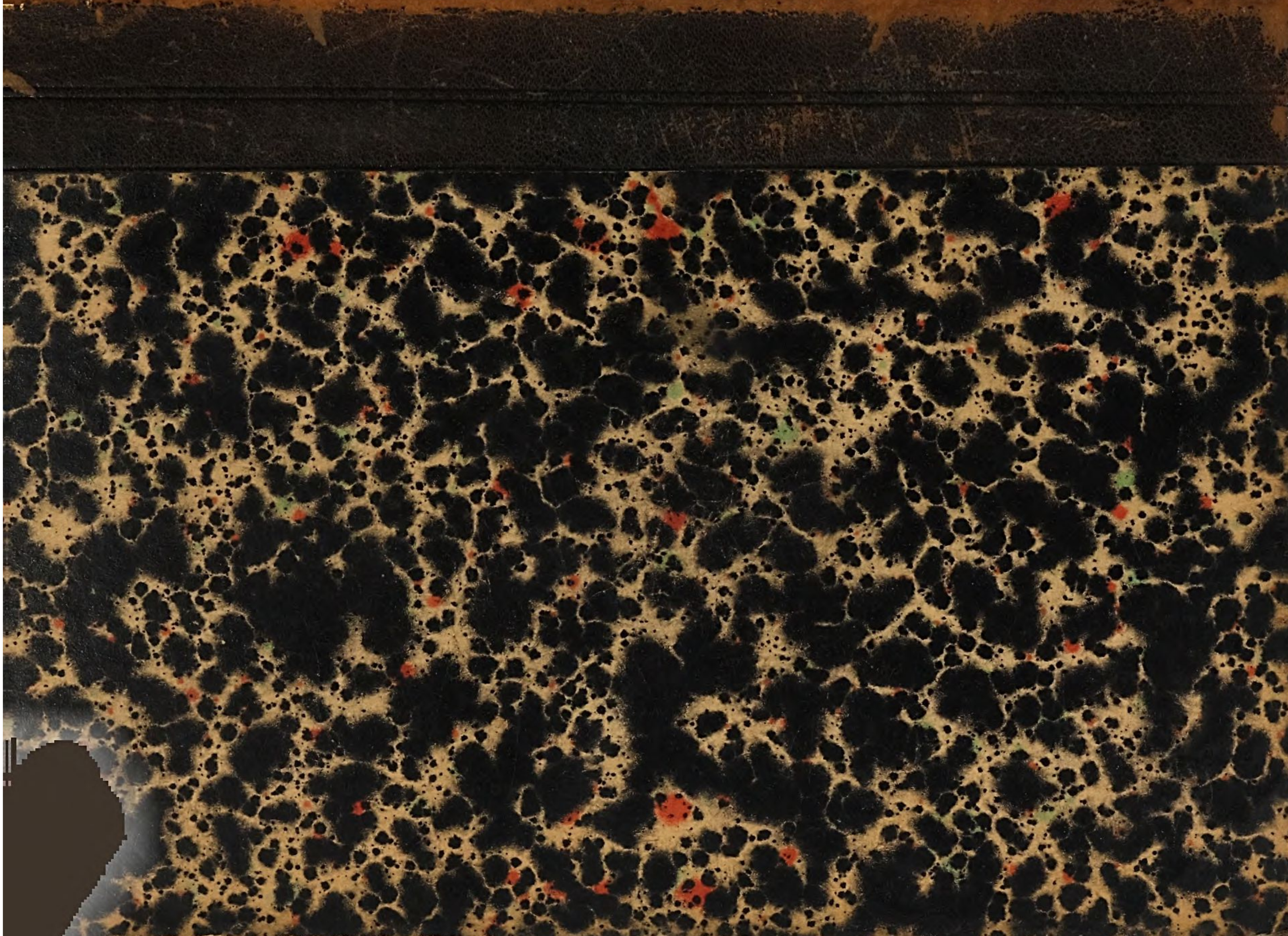

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VOL. 2912.

THE MASKED VENUS.

BY

RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. 2.

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VOL. II.

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A STORY OF MANY LANDS

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RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE,

AUTHOR OF "MY OFFICIAL WIFE," ETC.

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1893.

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In a darkened chamber of a splendid villa, bowered in silver-gray olive-groves, fringed with dark cypress, and graceful ilex, the Prince of Fürstenfeld, the haughty head of the wild clan of the Stahrensteins, lay slowly dying. Voluble Italian practitioners, earnest French medical luminaries, and a calm Briton, who dispatched his clients to the tomb with truly insular apathy, assembled daily, and effected nothing, save the dignified acceptance of their fees, and a consensus of opinion that even Max Stahrenstein, *of the sixteen quarterings*, must die. This general doom

hangs over us all! In the case of the Austrian magnate, the pallid finger of Death was already touching his marble brow!

"Silence! No excitement! Stimulants! Rest! —and then, quietly await the inevitable conclusion!" Such was the regimen directed.

"The lamp of life is burned out! The Count has drained too deeply the Circe cup of Pleasure!" the grave Italian in charge, poetically announced. He indulged in *unpublished* verses!

Adolf Stahrenstein moved about with serious face, and unruffled brow, and gravely accepted the *pro-forma* expressions of the medical staff. His dark, fierce eyes burned with a wolfish glare, as he noted Irene Gordon's imperial form, gliding among the trees and through the shaded alleys; her lovely face hidden in a silvery veil. The Hussar gazed along the Riviera di Ponente, with its beauty-haunted shores, and the blue Mediterranean stretching away a sparkling sapphire zone! . . . Yachts swiftly flitting along, spreading their graceful white wings, seemed to call him away to where Corsica and Sardinia hovered, washed by the dancing waves, plowed once by the galleys of Rome.

"I would make a heaven for her in the islands of the Greek Sea!—She should see the storied

East, with its lotus and fronded palms fringing exquisite Philæ! With *her* as my own, life would take on a new gladness as the golden hours were dreamed away. Great God! Will Max *never* die? I fear I give him too *weak* a dose! But I will win her! She shall be *mine!* She is a woman to *die for!*

"But I must have some diversion! I shall go mad here, waiting!" Fortune favored Adolf. The sly Italian Doctor, (now a resident of the villa,) looked toward the rising social sun. The coming Count was a fountain of golden gain!

"My dear Baron!" the Doctor said, "your brother may linger for weeks! You can do nothing! Madame suffers from this isolation and suspense! You are too active for this confinement! Induce her to go out *with you!* We must guard the living, as well as fight for the life of your noble brother!"

Adolf Stahrenstein was now easily friendly with the beautiful modern goddess. At the board she presided with a consummate grace, and in low tones they carried on an intercourse which was a prelude of the future.

"Did she suspect?" Adolf was fearful! It was not so! Her eyes only dropped before the burning glances of the *coming* Lord of Stahren-

stein, the man who found the woman his dying brother had loved, to be the fairest of the daughters of Eve!

Day by day Max lingered! His desperate struggle for life was buoyed up by his maddening passion for the hidden Diva.

Her voice was silent now.

"You must go out! Go with Adolf! I will not chain you to this house of gloom!" he whispered. This was the sly Doctor's work. So, flashing through the mellow moonlight, drawn by the Count's superb Hungarian steeds,—or floating in a dainty shallop on the sparkling waters,—and in gazing together, on the throngs on the Promenade des Anglais, Adolf Stahrenstein gloated daily on the beauty of the woman, whose slightest touch now thrilled his whole being. Watching him from beneath her veiled lashes, her witching smile inflamed his ardor. They were *both* silent, —*both* "waiting!"

No passionate words yet broke the thin veil between these guilty minds, in their burning unrest! On the terrace, wandering down the Corso, or listening to the dreamy heart-moving music at Monaco, Adolf Stahrenstein's passion, fed by a now unrestrained intercourse, grew daily. He was the abject slave of the Diva.

Veiled as ever, she gazed on the deluded fools battling for unearned gold in the grand gaming halls. And still Max lingered,—the dark angel's wing just sweeping his pallid face!

"Take me *home,* home *at once!* Baron!" cried Irene, with a sudden clutch at his protecting arm, as they strolled around the beautiful grounds of the Palace of Fortune, a few evenings after Beverly Seaton had arrived at Nice.

"What is the matter? *I* will protect you! What is it?" quickly said Adolf.

"We are dogged! We are followed!" the frightened beauty said.

"By whom?" the officer fiercely demanded.

"I cannot speak now! Take me to the carriage!" Adolf hastened to bear the half-fainting woman away. She trembled as he wrapped the robes around her. Well she might! For the cold, pitiless eyes of Horace Jenks, now desperate, were glaring at her only a few yards away. His quick glance caught the blazonry of the Stahrenstein arms, and noted the well-known livery, in the blaze of the myriad brilliant lights.

"By Heavens! I *have* her now! Revenge, at least, shall be mine!" Jenks swore, under his breath. Warned by Baptiste of her real protector, he had haunted the approaches to Stahren-

stein's villa, and he swore, now that his fair quarry was at bay,—"She shall not give me the slip again!"

In telegraphing Seaton, he wished to loose a double thunderbolt to strike her down. "I must get these proofs back from him! But I must seem to yield to him. He shall be the hand to strike, I will be the *directing mind!*" The devil smile came back to his haggard face.

As the carriage rolled along on its velvet springs, Adolf Stahrenstein, in the half hour of quiet gazing at Irene Gordon's beaming eyes, poured out at last his passion in a flood of burning words.

"Let *me* protect you! Let *me* guard you! I am the only hand free to strike a blow for you! Listen! In a few weeks I will be the Lord of Stahrenstein! You shall be a queen! I will make your life a heaven! Isabel! I love you madly! You must be mine forever! Let me strike down this villain! Your enemy! *Tell me all!*" His voice quivered with the intoxication of his mad love, for her perfumed hair swept his face. The curves of her voluptuous beauty in soft contact, drove him farther into an ecstasy of unholy desire!

She grasped his two hands. "Can I trust

you? You are brave! Will you be *brave*, and *silent?*"

"I swear it by my life!" the soldier murmured, covering her hands with passionate kisses. They were nearing the great arch of the villa gateway. The night wind softly rustled the olive leaves; the gentle dash of the breaking waves dying on the silvery sanded beach, alone broke the silence of the hushed and wooing night, whose soft shades wrapped the romantic shores of the Riviera. Irene's eyes blazed like lustrous darkened diamonds.

"Tell your man to drive down the road a half hour!" There was an accent in her melting voice which made him shudder. "When *we are free,*—when you are *Lord of Stahrenstein,* I will give you a *life for a life!* I will be yours till *eternity,* if you free me from the cowardly scoundrel who follows my lonely path! *He must die!*"

Adolf caught the desperate woman in his arms in a wild embrace.

"Ah!" she said, "*only* when *he is dead,* Adolf!" The suggestive melody of her temptress voice thrilled the inner soul of the guilty lover. "Wait!" she said, with her imperial air, "I will now tell you all!"

Before the splendid horses dropped their tired heads at the *porte cochère,* Adolf Stahrenstein had marked his man down. "Mees Isabel" had told her specious story! The noble was enraged!

"I do not *know* him, but I have *heard* of him! Listen,—such a man will certainly watch you closely. He dares not intrude here. We will go as usual to the Quartier de la Croix de Marbre,—to the resorts,—to Monaco. Show him to me! Simply indicate him! He, a man of the world, will frequent the Casino, and the balls. I cannot quarrel with him without a cause. I cannot involve *you* in a public scandal. If we meet him at any of these places, I will give him a chance to accost you! He may do so! If *he does*, —*he dies!* Be ruled by me, and I will rid you of this low brute! And then, *then,* Isabel,—you shall reign forever at Stahrenstein!"

The guilty pair separated quietly. Adolf paused before the door where Max struggled with the freezing tide of death rising close to his gallant heart. "It is *working now,*" the Hussar grimly thought, as low moans proved the great Count's tossing agony.

Three days later Baron Adolf Stahrenstein was seated alone in the library. The house was quiet.

"Mees Isabel" was seated in her queenly apartment, watching a dancing white sail rising on the far horizon.

"Oh! happy ship, to rise and dip,
With the blue crystal at your lip!"

she thought as she gazed! Her sombre eyes lightened. "No! Not at Stahrenstein! I will seek the calm tranquil glow of eastern skies, where the morning star swings in heaven, an eternal *lamp of love!* Not in those gloomy Noric wilds! Never! There would be memories, *awful memories* which I could not face! We will go far away into the land where the golden morning breaks in splendor over the storied eastern world!" As she mused, a card was handed to the Baron (her volunteer assassin, now partner of *another* guilty secret,) by the grave-faced Swiss. Adolf twirled it doubtfully in his hands.

MR. ALFRED BRAYTON.

"For *me,* Julius?" he said.

"No! Herr Baron; for the Herr Graf!"

"Inform the gentleman that Graf Max is gravely ill, and can see no one! This is positive!" said Adolf in a ringing voice. "With regrets! No one can see him *for any reason whatever!*"

Adolf Stahrenstein gazed on the stranger striding away with springing step—the lithe, practised stride of a Virginian light infantry man. He could only see the back of the retreating visitor.

A sudden chill seized him. "Is *that* the man I am going to kill? This may be a stratagem! Donnerwetter! This room is cold! My teeth are chattering!" He touched the foot bell. "Bring me a Cognac, Julius! I have taken cold!"

Below Beatrice Seaton's window, screened only by a veil of gracefully falling branches, Beverly Seaton walked away, grinding his teeth. Baffled! Was it a trick? No! for a few peasants, toiling at the stone arches and copings of the great park walls, told him that the mighty lordling was going through the narrow gate, where clown and conqueror finally jostle each other, pale forgotten shades!

"By God! Even *vengeance* is denied me!" the heart-broken wanderer cried. "Is she hidden there?" He turned and gazed on the gloomy "Castle Dangerous." "It would be madness to force my way in! But it is *his* life or *mine!*"

At the Hotel Chauvain, he listened to the story of Horace Jenks. "I have been staying with some old friends of mine at Monaco!" Seaton easily divined that they were "Knights of the

Green Cloth." Jenks told his story: "I don't know who was with her! Some German sprig of nobility, I suppose! Some convenient friend of the great Stahrenstein!" Seaton writhed, but kept his temper. "I have had them traced to the villa!" Jenks continued. "They are impregnable there! I do not care to make a public outcry here!"

"Why?" said Seaton, sharply; "does the Paris scandal follow you here?" Horace Jenks dropped his eyes. "They have shut up the club! Baptiste writes me from St. Helier's! He is safe! *I* shall go to Corsica in a few days. I have my baggage at Mentone, and am free there from any French pursuit. Mr. Brayton," said he, "I wish you would return me *those matters* I gave you in this case!" His voice trembled slightly; it was a turning point!

"I think I will *keep them* for the present, Mr. Jenks!" said the supposed Brayton. "*I* may have to act at once! *You* may have to *fly* to avoid imprisonment! I am free!"

"I have a right to these articles!" Jenks hotly said.

"Well! I will leave it to Inspector Walling, and the United States Ambassador! See here, Jenks!" said Brayton, "you cannot face publicity now, and you *know it!* That will do! I will *co-*

operate with you, but I will take the entire charge of the quest now."

"If I can get face to face with that woman, there may be more publicity than you dream of!" said Horace Jenks, as he turned on his heel and went out into the night. "If you want me, send for me to this address!" snarled the gambler as he departed.

"I must get Orton up from Villefranche to shadow the whole affair! I cannot lose Jenks from sight; but Orton must not run against him! Pshaw! I don't fear Jenks now! The great problem is, what shall I *do?*" Some mystic voice in his heart whispered, "Wait!" The Fates were spinning their threads.

Horace Jenks, plunging into the vortex of the Monte Carlo games, dissipated his fierce excitement in winning and losing heaps of gold. It quieted his mind. "I have already money enough! I do not care to *lose;* I hardly need to *win!* When I am done, I will settle down in London, with a Prince Albert frock, an irreproachable umbrella, and a forty-shilling hat. I think I would make a good English club man! Single handed I can 'do up' the heavy-eyed Cockneys! Oh! If I had Baptiste *there!* Too dangerous!" he mused.

"Hello, old man!" said a convive, a free-lance friend, as Jenks moodily gathered up his napoleons and prepared to leave the *Salle de jeu,* "going to the Masked Ball?"

"Where? When?" listlessly said Jenks.

"To-morrow night, at the Casino! All the visiting nobility will be there! The gilded Paphian goddesses; and even the *hoi polloi* dames, who can raise a hundred francs, robe themselves decently, and behave themselves for three hours! This is Bohemia *sur la mer!*"

"I think I *will* go with you," slowly said Jenks. "I may meet 'Mees Isabel' there, and her cavalier," he thought. "It's a good idea! Any one can speak to a woman at a Masked Ball; especially *here!*" He sneered as he thought of the ephemeral local nobility *en voyage.* Alleged Russian Countesses, — Prussian Baronesses, — French Marquises, and languishing Italian "Ladies of the Court," ogled the crowd of polyglot swains on the "Lovers' Walk," while bold-eyed English beauties, graduates of the Argyle Rooms, sneered from their gaudy equipages, (with natural spite,) at the fetching miscellaneous American adventuresses, (high voiced and over-dressed,) who were the prettiest Adamless Eves of this Paradise of Frou-Frous! At eleven o'clock, while the ball

was beginning to change from a cautious promenade to a crescendo *à la Bacchanale,* Jenks, concealed behind the clustering palms of the corridor, scanned the arrivals of note. From his coign of vantage, he noted at last the splendid equipage of Stahrenstein.

"It is the *Masked Venus,*" he said, as he caught his breath, for now he knew De Brissac's story, from Baptiste. There, beneath the sombre domino, were the sweeping folds of the long white Austrian cloak. "Mees Isabel" had lost the scruples of the woman who clung in fear to Max Stahrenstein at the Paris pandemonium of pleasure. She was *lancée* now!

The tall, exquisitely graceful form swept by. He caught a flash of two gleaming eyes. Her burly companion, muffled in a black domino, hurried her along. He was a dark and menacing spectre.

"There is *my enemy, now!*" the Masked Venus hissed, under her black velvet visor. Adolf Stahrenstein turned and gazed steadily at the watchful gambler. Jenks was not in mask, and his quiet elegance did not betray the sporting man. Even "Californian" gamblers become *raffiné* in Paris!

"Ah! Excellent!" Adolf murmured. "Now

let him only dare to follow you up! It is well! I shall leave you for a little while, but I will linger within close hearing. If he will only but fall into the trap!" The lovely wanton whispered burning words to the young officer. Their hidden promise set his heart aflame!

"It is a *life for a life;* I am then *yours forever!*" And Adolf Stahrenstein staked his heritage on a worthless woman's ever-changing whim.

Beverly Seaton and the watchful Orton were not ten yards away, gazing steadfastly on the cat-like Jenks, who slowly entered the ball-room. There was a look on his face such as the leader of a "forlorn hope" might wear.

"Cornered at last!" muttered Jenks. "I will see the face *behind that mask* to-night!"

"Keep reasonably near me! Don't lose Jenks from sight! Do not approach me unless I raise my hand to my brow, *thus!*" said Seaton. His heart was beating quickly. "It is a close night! This domino is stifling! It seems as if the air was laden with poison! It is a fit night for murder!" thought Seaton, as he parted from Orton.

Higher swelled the music. Louder grew the reckless laughter. In bower and anteroom, in

little nooks and dim corners, the popping of corks indicated the height of the merry war.

As Seaton marked the astonished crowd dividing, right and left, before a vision of audaciously undraped loveliness, the cool, white-fanged Tartar Prince Demidoff, just landed from his graceful yacht, the restless *Aphrodite,* bit his lip till it bled.

"*Tiens! C'est bien la Vénus Masquée, et avec Adolf Stahrenstein! Vraiment, décidément,—elle doit venir en Russie!* Poor old Max! He takes a long time to die! I fancy they are both impatient!" Demidoff gnashed his teeth, as he thought that *they* included Adolf and the recreant "Venus."

"I will watch them; while they laugh, and drink and dance and make love, poor old Max lies dying *alone!* I must go and see him!" It was a far-away memory of the "houses of hair," for the strange Tartar chieftain had a remembrance of "broken bread and tasted salt." "It's a hard, hard world," (thought the Muscovite,) "even a *millionaire Prince* may lack a *cup of water* in his last agony!"—

In an hour, flushed and tired, her heart beating with an unsated thirst for vengeance, her pulses throbbing with the madness of wine, the Masked

Venus sat in a curtained alcove. Her imperial head reclined insolently on the silken cushions of her chair, and the long clinging white cloak gave proof of the glowing perfections, over which *men* were madly raving. She was "Venus Victrix" now.

"Fear not! I am near!" said the truculent Austrian. "If he comes ever, it will be to-night!" He retired to an anteroom passage, whence he could see the rear of this Paphian bower.

In five minutes a firm hand parted the curtains. The Masked Venus could hear her heart beat like the thrilling tick of a clock in a lonely house. She stood on the verge of some one's grave. *Whose?*

"Good evening! Miss Irene Hope!" said the intruder. The woman sprang up. "Hold! One moment! For *your life!*" said Jenks. His wrinkled brow and flaming eye proved that *for once* "the invisible spirit of wine" had buoyed up a yet unshaken courage.

"Coward! what do you *hound me down* for?" cried the woman, springing to her feet. On the *other* side of the curtain Demidoff, the Russian Prince? meditated, (in his second-nature French,) "They speak a language I know not,—but I am

sure, a quarrel comes! Is this my day of *bonnes fortunes?*"

Walking up and down, arm-in-arm, five paces away, Beverly Seaton said: "Orton! *she is in there!* Jenks is reckless, and has intruded! Watch me now! Are you armed?"

Orton smiled, his thin lips parting like a panther's. "It is second nature to me," he calmly said; "and *you*, Brayton?" Orton's voice rang with a real anxiety.

"I am prepared," said Beverly Seaton, and his voice sounded like the sentinel's stern call, as the click of the lock follows the last challenge: "Who goes there?"

"Be calm, for God's sake, Brayton! Don't entangle yourself! This game will break our way! Let *them* wrangle."

A rustling silken fold gave out the bullying accent of Horace Jenks' voice, as he replied to the woman's sudden demand.

"I want to know when you saw *Egbert Neill last!* I will see the face *behind that mask!*" His hand was lifted.

"My God! *Adolf!*" the cloaked Venus shrieked. It mingled with the frantic laughter of the dancers, and the swell of the orchestra. But there was a crash!

Demidoff dropped his cigarette and tore the curtain aside. There, prone on the floor lay Jenks, his eyes twitching. Over him towered a burly form in a funereal domino!—The Masked Venus had fled into the corridor.

"*A la bonne heure! mon brave!*" cried the still muffled assailant. "*Gardez Madame! J'y serai tout de suite!*" and Adolf Stahrenstein faced Seaton and Orton as Jenks struggled to his feet. They grasped the infuriated gambler.

"Your *card!* Who are you?" hissed Jenks, as Seaton and Orton restrained him.

"Heavens! Orton! You here?" Jenks gasped.

"I have just arrived," sharply said Orton. "Be silent!"

The sneering domino drew forth a card-case, and gazing to see if Demidoff had finished his task of placing "Madame" in a place of safety, he waited, his eyes burning ominously through his mask. The springy step of Demidoff faintly broke the silence, as he returned.

"*Madame est dans la voiture avec Josef. Je suis à vos ordres!*"

"*Très bien!*" said the masked Hussar. "*La danse va commencer! attendons!*"

For the swelling music drowned all interior noises; and every box and alcove was filled with

loudly chattering members of Vanity Fair. The three Americans conferred quickly.

"Let *me* attend to this, Jenks!" said Seaton. "I suppose you wish to fight at once!"

"Any way! any weapons! anywhere!" said the gambler, "and *instantly!* I only want five minutes to talk to you!"

"Good!" said Seaton. "Give me your card-case!"

Prince Demidoff advanced with consummate courtesy. He exchanged a few words in a low voice with Seaton, whose manner was calmly expectant. The exchange of their own cards was a polite preliminary! "Mr. Alfred Brayton" stood face to face with the proud Tartar.

"And, as this is immediate, a blow has been given—will *your* friend *unmask* and give me his name?" Seaton calmly requested.

"You are right, sir!" said Demidoff; "I crave your pardon!" He retired for a moment, and holding the card of Horace Jenks in his hand, conversed earnestly with the still masked assailant.

Jenks, clutching Orton's hands, was raving in the far corner of the box. Seaton, his gray eye lit with an ominous expectancy, waited the action of Demidoff.

"I am sorry," said the Russian, gazing earnestly

in Seaton's eyes, "that we are in a singular position! I am a stranger to all here but *my friend!*" He was impressed by the air of breeding in Seaton's face, and his quiet manner. "My friend says that *your principal* is a professional gambler, and disgraced already! No gentleman," said Demidoff, softly, "can go out with a man who is a *criminal fugitive!* Is he Mr. Horace Jenks, of the Cercle des Étrangers *à* Paris?"

"Will you permit *me,*" said Seaton calmly, "to *again* remind you that your friend is still *masked,* and that I have not yet his name?"

Demidoff handed Seaton a card, silently. "You are *again* right, sir! My friend shall unmask, but I will not let him fight this man, who may be an unpunished swindler! Let him retire; then my friend will conclude this matter." Jenks stepped outside.

"Suit yourself," said Seaton quietly; "but only a *coward* will not unmask! When a man strikes a man, he *must* fight! It is too late then to talk of *character!*"

"Then *I* shall have to assume the responsibility," said Demidoff, bowing gravely.

"*I* shall do the same for the party assailed!" replied Seaton; "but *first* your man unmasks." As he spoke, he turned, the card clutched in his

nervous hand. His eye rested on the word "Stahrenstein."

With the bound of a tiger Seaton sprang forward and tore the mask from the face of the sullen giant.

"This quarrel is mine! Coward!" he hissed, as he planted his flat open hand smartly on the cheek of the unveiled Adolf. The Austrian was astounded at a new enemy.

Orton, revolver in hand, was at Seaton's side in a moment.

"Now!" said he. "Let *me* act!" As Demidoff frantically raved, Seaton quietly said to Orton: "I will fight the *principal* first; the *second* afterwards!" He seated himself and gazed upon the enemy. Orton conferred with the fierce Russian.

"See here! Seaton," said Orton. "This is *serious!* But we are the challenged party now! What do you wish? There is a shooting gallery near here, with a basement for *le tir.* What shall it be? This *second* is a game man!"

"Pistols,—and as near as you can get!" quietly replied the Virginian. "And Jenks must withdraw! It is only fair!"

In twenty words Orton had closed his mission.

"The only thing is *distance,* and the *fire!*"

"Make it *five paces,* and both *fire at the word!*

Toss up for the word! For all I care,—make it three paces! I do not *wish* to live,—and by God! *he shall not!*"

As the combatants filed out of the corridor the orchestra broke into the merry, floating, love-provoking "Beautiful Blue Danube."

"I will be with you in half an hour, darling!" said Adolf Stahrenstein, as he neared the carriage of his Cleopatra. He seized Irene's hand and covered it with kisses. "Demidoff will come to you with the news." She shuddered and was silent,—a trembling Venus now! The carriage moved up and down the alley of trees in the moonlight; and Irene waited with her heart aflame.

Face to face, at five paces, Beverly Seaton and Adolf Stahrenstein soon stood pistols in hand! Jenks cowered outside the door, as not a party of the final conflict. He could not go away. "Not fit to be *killed,* even in a chance quarrel," was the professional gambler's gloomy realization of his status!

Seaton said quietly to Orton: "The note I have pencilled to Inspector Walling will close all my business. I have your pledge of honor, all my Paris deposits and belongings go to him sealed! Now let me *be quiet!*"

With a gravity, (beyond his youth,) Demidoff laid down a white handkerchief to mark each man's foot. It was frightfully near.

"For the word," said the Prince, who was "on parade," "let us trust to chance, sir! Give me *a coin!* I *will toss!*"

"You have it!" remarked Orton.

Seaton, whose eye had never left the now glowering enemy, quietly took his place. "Thank God! This seals the past! One of us *two* must die! Let it be *me!*" But it was of his *lost sister* he spoke. For as he threw his slender form "on line," there was a steely glitter in the steady eye showing the unshaken nerve which carried Pickett's Virginia Light Infantry into Hancock's works at bloody Gettysburg, and, (with a five minutes' panic,) might have carried them on to rule imperial New York!

"Demidoff! my friend! This is the *wrong man!*" muttered Adolf. "I want *the other!*" For he had not *yet* earned his reward!

"Too late, *mon cher!*" said the inflexible Russian. "You can explain to her to-morrow, *on my yacht!*" A moment's silence. The Prince, with one last manly warning in glance to both, gave the word.

As Beverly Seaton spun around from the

heavy blow of a ball on his broadest rib, the coming Lord of Stahrenstein fell flat on his face, as the old forest oak crashes down, clutching the pistol tightly in the last convulsion of his unshrinking heart. Seaton gazed blankly at his fallen enemy.

"Too late, gentlemen!" said the thick-voiced surgeon, whose rambling words were suggestive of absinthe and Monte Carlo.

"*Monsieur! va-t'en! Il* EST MORT!" Demidoff called Orton, and covering Adolf Stahrenstein's face, said, "*Je vous salue, Monsieur!* We part here *forever!* It was a fair duel!"

His sober words fell unheeded on Orton's ear, for Beverly Seaton's flesh wound brought him to his knees.

Demidoff gave his final directions to two or three habitués, and departed. The doctor was now bending over the devoted brother of the woman who waited vainly for the dead Adolf, wrapped in her rich robes under the rustling lindens on the square.

Horace Jenks, (with blanched face,) aided Orton in his efforts to prepare the fainting Seaton for the already waiting carriage.

"Let him alone; *you* have killed him, you fool!" sternly said Orton.

"And the other?" Jenks' eyes fell on the shapeless mass, covered now with a billiard cloth. Some fatal fascination nerved him to gaze, as the handkerchief of the vanquished Prince fell from the now waxy face!

Seaton groaned and opened his eyes, as the bearers softly raised him to bear him to the carriage.

"My God!" cried Jenks, "you have killed a *stranger!* This is not Max Stahrenstein! This man is innocent! *He* did not *take her away!*"

"*Who* is he?" whispered Seaton.

The anxious proprietor said: "The *young Baron Adolf;* Stahrenstein's only brother!"

Seaton fell into a senseless slumber, as Jenks, slinking out, muttered: "I am off to Mentone, and a fishing boat will land me in Corsica in twelve hours. This is cold *murder!* That devil woman's work!" And Orton saw him no more.

Springing lightly into the carriage, Demidoff cried to the coachman hoarsely, "*Allez!*" Isabel's heart beat madly!

The Masked Venus grasped his hands,—"And, Adolf?"

Demidoff pressed his hands on his eyes. "*Killed at the first fire!*" The woman dropped her head as if a thunderbolt had struck her down.

"See here, Josef," cried Demidoff, when the town limits were passed; "stop and *come in here!*" The frightened valet entered the body of the carriage. "I will drive to the landing and take this lady on board the *Aphrodite.* Go to the villa and tell only the Doctor what has happened. Let him attend to the funeral of Baron Adolf! Do not let *Count Max* know! Pack all Madame's goods! Get them quietly out! Say nothing! You have no master now! Come to Spezzia by rail! The yacht will wait there! Do not waste a single instant! Tell the *Maître d'Hôtel,* also! He knows me! Bring the maid, and meet me at Spezzia!" Thrusting a bank note in Josef's hand, he said: "Here's an empty carriage; take it! Be quick and faithful; if you succeed your future is assured!"

As Demidoff raced down to the landing, Josef drove up his fiacre before the villa. The windows were open. The lights streaming forth everywhere.

"Count Max?" he gasped, as the *Maître d'Hôtel* opened the door.

"Died, ten minutes ago, calling for Baron Adolf; where is he?"

Josef drew the Doctor aside. "My God! Two at once!" cried the frightened Italian. "Horrible! Horrible!"

As the *Aphrodite* skimmed into Spezzia Harbor, the Venus,—masked no longer,—said with a shudder: "Do with me as you will! Take me away,—far away! I have no heart! It broke when Adolf Stahrenstein died."

"All *good things* come to Russia," murmured Demidoff as he paced the deck. "She shall learn to forget him!"

The beautiful fugitive gazed stonily at the varied panorama of sea and shore!

"All hope is lost forever!" she muttered. "Let the demon of Vengeance drive me whither he will! Only the East is safe, now, or—*Russia!*"

CHAPTER X.

AFTER THE BALL! ON THE "APHRODITE." JOSEF TURNED ADRIFT. HOMEWARD BOUND! GORDON'S COMMISSION. AT CAMPOFORMIO! ORTON'S DILEMMA.

WHILE the swift *Aphrodite* flitted in and out of the winding channels of the Italian coast, Beverly Seaton tossed on a bed of pain at the Hotel Chauvain. There was a flood of gossip, (a seven days' wonder,) pouring through café and Casino. The long-expected demise of Count Stahrenstein astonished no one. The remarkable career of the reckless Baron Adolf was accentuated by "the deep damnation of his taking off."

"I always knew that he would one day leave us in such a *sudden* manner," philosophically remarked De Brissac, who had run down for a dash at the Gibraltar of Monte Carlo. "He was always very quarrelsome. Well! It is a lucky stroke for this poor devil of a second cousin, who takes a jump from the obscurity of an aristocratic pauper,—a mere Sub-Lieutenant of

Horse,—to be the great Graf von Stahrenstein. It *was* very foolish of poor Adolf! He must have neglected the *shooting gallery!* And *ce diable de* Brayton! who would have thought that *quiet little fellow* was a fire eater? I must resume *my own* pistol practice!"

De Brissac did not know that Seaton's marksmanship had been perfected on fields like Spottsylvania where brothers fired, point blank, all long summer days into each other's faces.

In ten days, Beverly Seaton turned wearily to the watchful Orton. "What of Jenks?" he whispered.

"I have a scrawl from him at Ajaccio, addressed to me, in your care.—He is safe. He only says: 'I shall keep out of the way!' He gave me a *sure* address at St. Heliers, Jersey, which I suppose is really this fellow Baptiste's."

"And the villa! What news from there?" Seaton demanded.

"The brothers are both buried, and the house is shut up. The servants have all returned to Fürstenfeld."

"What do you mean?" faltered Seaton, his fever-lit eye flickering wildly.

"The old Count died just before his brother's body was brought home."

"Balked by Fate! My God!" muttered the Virginian. He turned his white face to the wall.

"Where is this infernal woman; the Masked Venus?" Beverly resumed in a hollow voice. His excitement weakened him.

"She is *gone;* she never returned to the villa! There is but one clue. Josef, (the valet of the late Count,) attended with the party at the Ball. He too is gone, *alone,* by rail to Italy. The rest of the establishment left in five days for Fürstenfeld; and, *that same night,* Prince Demidoff, (the Baron's second,) left on his yacht for an eastern cruise." Orton paused. He began to wonder at Seaton's quest. "Could this reckless woman be his runaway wife? Was it a husband's vengeance?"

"What is your opinion?" continued the wounded duellist.

"I think that *Demidoff* carried off the veiled beauty! Women of her desperate nature are prompt to seize the first means of escape. Any door swings easily on golden hinges; and the high-bred Muscovite had good reason to take away the most dangerous witness!"

Beverly Seaton was now breathing heavily.

"I must admit, though, that the Prince has acted most handsomely. He has written a formal *procès-verbal* for the Russian Consul-General at

Marseilles, who has already been down here to inquire. He says it was a fair duel, and provoked by *no* quarrel of yours; save upon Stahrenstein's refusal to *unmask,* after striking your friend! I have also signed a document as *témoin,* and the Surgeon has done the same. The public prosecutor told me that the Austrian Consul-General is also thoroughly satisfied, although he deplores the loss of his friends."

"I shall go home, as soon as I can travel! I will go back! I throw up this blind quest! But I wish *you* to watch the Italian journals, and the *Galignani!* The Prince's yacht will be reported! I wish you to go over to Italy and find out if *she,—if* this missing woman, is on this yacht! I will confer with Inspector Walling at New York, and then go away for a long voyage!" Seaton sighed. "I did not wish to kill *this man!* It was the *other!* It is now too late! All is over!"

"Mr. Brayton, I will certainly follow out your wishes, but you have not yet told me all!" the detective firmly replied.

"That *is so,* Orton!" said the sufferer slowly; "but what you do not *find out* will be buried with me! Of what avail to open the tombs of past years?"

"You are right!" said Orton. "This woman

is on her downward path! This glittering halo will soon fade! Hurried on from one scene of vicious deviltry to another, the final plunge will not be long delayed. What is before her now? The prison,—a hospital,—the Morgue! I have seen the last hours of dozens of these *anonymas.* It would deter even the most feathered-brained daughter of Eve, from entering on a 'gay life' to watch the grisly shadows of Doom closing relentlessly around these jewelled playthings of man's idle hour.—I am heartily sorry for them.

"First, there is always a *primal wrong;* some early heart break; a cold treachery; some cowardly advantage taken of a loving woman's ardent feelings, which can never be righted. I have a lingering pity for the poor warm-hearted women, (often the most generous of their sex,) who throw themselves blindly into the arms of their lovers, asking nothing but that *constancy,* which is almost a modern chimera! Less loving, often less lovable, the maid, *bien élevée,* coldly passes into the fate of matrimony, (often bought and sold,) and sometimes, (with a fouler heart,) sneers at her soiled sister, hovering *without* the sheltering portals of 'Society!'

"Now, try and sleep!—I will take your orders in detail when you are able to go home. I think

you are acting prudently. The Stahrensteins were known from Cairo to the Scotch moors, and your presence would be heralded everywhere. Your efforts would be balked everywhere, by this quick-witted 'Lady of the Night.'"

Far away, in the crystal glow of eastern skies, the graceful *Aphrodite* glided, a silver-winged ocean bird, past the storied shores of southern Italy. A folding of her white pinions at Spezzia, enabled Demidoff to take away Josef, the second important witness of the *Bal Masqué.* As the fleet yacht dashed away southward, throwing high in the air the white foam, spurned by her glancing copper-sheathed prow, the World's Waif sat gloomily gazing on the purpling cliffs receding in the dim distance. With tact, Prince Demidoff gave his bright-browed guest, ample time for her lonely musings! . . .

"Max dead! Adolf in the tomb! I am *again* a wanderer!" Setting her face resolutely against the fresh breeze rasping over the ruffled waves, Irene, the hunted fugitive, cried, "Onward! *On,* to the world's end!" For she dared not look backward. The kisses of her dead Austrian lover, burned yet upon her nerveless hands.—Money, she had still; and the priceless jewels showered upon her by the dead Austrian Prince, whose re-

quiem was now being chanted in the far-off chapel at Fürstenfeld, where he lay in all the sombre richness of feudal mortuary splendor. Beside him, silent, gone unshriven to an unknown world, slept in death all that was once the mad Baron Adolf!—

This modern Cain, reposed by the side of the silent head of the house,—the brother who died with his murderer's name on his lips! Away, towards the mysterious East, the cold Tartar, Demidoff, bore the insidious beauty, for whom both the headlong Stahrensteins died.

Lying in her splendid cabin, where the plash of the refreshing waves lulled her to sleep, after the sun had dipped far out in the wild Atlantic, beyond the Pillars of Hercules, the Masked Venus with her heart steeled to face a future, (hideous in its awful promise,) stifled the whispering voice of Conscience. No shadow of the past affrighted her; no softened moment touched her! She heard not, in the sigh of the winds, that awful menace: "Vengeance is mine! I will repay, saith the Lord!" Driven before the gales of a stormy life, this mad woman dashed onward. Fear behind,—no rosy star of Hope lighting her way,—she dared not ask herself, "Whither do I drift?"

In cautious undertones, Demidoff related the

news brought by Josef, who now discreetly avoided the sight of the splendid woman, whose audacious beauty was the curse of the dead brothers. The valet lurked in the crew's quarters, and thought only of his own imperilled future. He had enriched himself with sundry *self-allotted* gifts of price. The secrets of the lonely villa were his alone!—"I will *not* trust myself in Russia with this wild Prince! He might fancy that I *know too much!* I might *never leave* that land of savage barbarity! As the yacht goes to Odessa, I will slip off at Messina!" for Josef reasoned sagely with himself: "I have no friend in this *haughty she-devil!* She will rule the mad Russian *for a time!* I might be in *her* way as well as in *his!*"

When the saucy *Aphrodite* rocked idly under the cliffs, where the sated Roman Emperors once toyed with the voluptuous beauties of their realm, Josef modestly asked for his discharge.

"I know not your strange land, *mon Prince!* I should be useless there!"

The princely Lothario was fain to dismiss Josef with a rich douceur. He left the yacht without a word to the lovely recluse, whom he had served at Stahrenstein. Josef was a past graduate in intrigue. He had learned his lesson

since he joined the dead Austrian Don Juan, as his trusted menial.

"This woman has a history. This American haunted the Rue de Jéna, and has followed Stahrenstein to his death! There is surely *money* in this for me! This woman is a prize! I will run back to Nice! The 'story of Campoformio' is worth a high price! I will hold it back, until I get my pay; but I will not fall into the hands of the cruel Russian, or this bright-eyed devil who carries only death and ruin in her train!" Four days later, Joseph discreetly made his inquiries at the Hôtel Chauvain.

"Mr. Alfred Brayton" was still too ill to see any one; but his *friend* and *second*, Orton, was keenly observant of Josef, who told him that Odessa was the destination of the Russian lover and his blood-bought Sultana.

"I will hold the Campoformio business to the last,—for money,—for a great price! Besides, if I am there, I can run over into Austria in four hours! The new Lord of Stahrenstein *may* give me a home! I will at least be *safe!* Money, money I must have! Why do they all hound the beautiful stranger down?"

Orton was puzzled by the cool assurance of the menial companion of Max Stahrenstein's varied

adventures. Spy, tool, and instrument of evil, Josef was the depository of the secrets of the glittering social *esclandres* of the dead votary of Pleasure. "I will tell you *the rest* at Campo-formio!" said the valet.

"This fellow knows more than he admits. He can put me on the right track, if he wishes! It will take solid gold to loosen his lips! But I will find her yet through him! I will not worry poor Brayton until he is well! It may be after all, that Jenks and Gordon are the *right men:* The three are all chasing this 'modest, queenly' Irene Hope,—this mysterious 'Mees Isabel,'—this flaunting Masked Venus,—I wonder how many more 'alias' names she has already figured under! Where was she nurtured? What early adventure turned her loose, at once wanton and vampire? *I* am certainly safe!" the worldly-wise "Hawkshaw" chuckled. "I have a choice of *three* employers; and a stylish European trip is not disagreeable! But why does not Lieutenant Gordon come over here *himself?* I suppose his soldierly pride will not let him leave his regiment while it is on active service!"

"Josef!" said Orton, (who was *never* eager, his professional coolness restraining him), "you must now go down to Villefranche and stay at my

hotel. Remain there, subject to my orders! I will go over to Campoformio with you as soon as my wounded friend goes home to America. He does not care to be pointed out every hour as the slayer of Baron Adolf!"

"I am at your service!" Josef remarked.

"And be sure to pick up all the gossip you can about this affair! You can run up to Monte Carlo; but keep away from Nice!" Orton was satisfied with the outlook. "By Jove! I have it now! I will let Brayton give me his *definite* orders! When I have loyally executed *them*, I am free to deal *later* with Jenks, or the Lieutenant! I am also operating on my *own* account! I believe there is some great estate mixed up in this mystery! A reckless woman, usually, is allowed to go to the dogs *in her own fashion,* but *everybody* seems to want the Masked Venus!"

Three weeks later, Beverly Seaton entered, at Nice, the express train for Paris. "Go along a few stations with me, Orton!" said he; "I want to lose this town from sight as soon as I can! Now, let us close up our *business* first! I wish you to take a run over to the Italian ports, and then go over the Brenner route to Fürstenfeld. I feel that I can trust you to do what is right!" The wounded man leaned back in the compartment

and gazed inquiringly at Orton. "It tires me to talk," he resumed. "What are your suggestions?"

"I only wish to know how far you wish me to go in expense;—and your limitations as to time!" Orton answered. "Moreover, *to whom* do I report? I am at your service!"

"Send your letters to *me*, care of Inspector Walling, General Police Headquarters, New York City. Use three months, (if you need the time,) and stop at five thousand dollars' expense. If you close up the work *sooner,* come home at once. Leave a full report for me with the Inspector at New York. I may go away for a time! I wish to forget!" and Seaton indicated the receding city of Nice, by a nod. "Get every detail of the life led by the woman at Schloss Stahrenstein. You need not pursue *her* farther. It is too late,—*too late!*"

Beverly Seaton dropped his head in his hands, and seemed to dream. "I'll write you from Paris to the Hôtel Chauvain,—and after I reach America, I will send my letters to the American Exchange, Paris;—write them your changing addresses!"

The silence was awkward. Orton was already provided with money, and a few necessary notes as to his duties. The train whistled loudly,—a station was near. "Good-bye, old fellow!" said

the duellist. "You stood by me *like a man!* I will never forget you!"

As Orton wrung Seaton's hand and jumped from the train, he felt in his heart that his generous employer was glad to part with him; for the ghost of Adolf Stahrenstein might be called up by the presence of the man who stood beside his slayer on the unforgotten night of the Bal Masqué.

Phineas Orton walked the Promenade des Anglais thoughtfully the day after his return, smoking his evening cigar, and watching "the white and ghostly flight of schooners out to sea." —"A roving commission, with full power, and liberal terms! My only trouble is, where to *begin!*" he meditated thus. Casting a glance at the bright stars, swinging up in the sapphire east, he murmured: "*She* is over there! By Jove! I would like to unravel that mystery! I would like to catch her! But I have nothing to *hold* her on!" And it suddenly flashed over him that "Mr. Alfred Brayton" had carried away all the proofs and evidence; for the disgruntled Jenks had written him how sternly "Brayton" had withheld all the tokens of "Mees Isabel's" complicity, and also Irene Hope's supposed guilt.

"By Heavens! I wonder! I swear I cannot

tell! Is this man *friend* or *foe*, to the Masked Venus?" And the tiger-like look on Brayton's face, as he leaped on Stahrenstein, came back to his memory. "He struck him without a word, and called out, 'This is *my* quarrel!' He had only seen the *card* then! He knew the *name*, but not the *face!* What can he be? A modern Menelaus, (chasing a very unscrupulous Helen,)—a disappointed lover,—an old protector,—or a relative? No! He can be *no* relative; he would have known more *from the first!* Did *Gordon* betray, and then ship away, his 'light o'love'?

"I will drift awhile! I am now alone! Every one knows me here. If I am watched, they will surely approach me, sooner or later. Josef I will call up here at once! I will operate on his cupidity! A *little* money now,—a little *more* by-and-by,—and *much* promised, which Josef will not get! I suppose he robbed the luggage of the brothers; trust him for that! I will show myself freely around the haunts of this gay town!—No one will harm me! As for the finale, *Vogue la galère!* it will be all the same in fifty years! Just the same, whether the Masked Venus lived a crowned *rosière,* or died a wealthy Messalina, with a store of jewels and a fund of *interesting reminiscences!* Your chaste nun, and your painted

Ninon de l'Enclos, alike sleep quietly, whether in the common fosse, or under a huge stone, besprinkled with egregious lies, chiselled in crumbling marble!"

Phineas Orton was a bit of a homespun philosopher.

"Ah! *Very good!*" he murmured, as the polite Chef de Bureau handed him a telegram, on entering his hostelry.

"Pinkerton! I suppose! Some new job!" Orton mused. The telegram, from the American Exchange at Paris, read:—

"Important documents from America mailed you, registered to-day. Report their receipt. Instructions cabled us for their immediate delivery. Answer immediately."

"I suppose some American Bank President has walked away with an actress; or, the faithful Cashier has milked the financial cow dry, and may now be enjoying an enforced furlough! Possibly some loving heart has 'coveted his neighbor's wife';—some callow youth is missed, whose hand has been thrust into an unguarded pocket! It's all the same,—only different phases of Vanity Fair! Well, I will practise on Josef till to-morrow night's mail arrives."

Orton, escaping observation, in a fishing boat, drifted next day along the shores, and in a long

conference, found in Josef a "foeman worthy of his steel." "By Jove! He really *brightens me up!* He is a rare scoundrel,—a pearl among valets,—a most judicious villain!"

Late that night, the detective pored over his letters. He was astonished. "I am glad Brayton is gone; I have no scruples now!" For his correspondent was none other than Lieutenant John Gordon, K troop,—Seventh U. S. Cavalry.

The same mail brought him a note from "Alfred Brayton": "I will just catch the lightning mail train through to Liverpool. I get the fast Cunarder."

"This is becoming a serious matter! I don't know if I am on my head, or my heels! Two women now; one dead, and one living! this is a ten strike! I must hang on to Josef! That's what this devil was holding back! Then there *were two* women mixed up in Neill's murder! Gordon, and Irene Hope, must have helped *one* away. Great Heavens! Could it have been Gordon's sister?" For Orton knew not the genealogy of the haughty Gordons of Belvoir.

"Show *me* a woman, and I'll show *you* a mystery," says the Frenchman. "By Heavens! here are *two* women and *two* first-class mysteries!" The puzzled detective mused as he read Gordon's

orders over and over. "I'll go right on to Campoformio and let this devil of a valet make the game there. But he will never slyly finger my papers. I'll send him on a day or so in advance."

With morning light, Josef, clinking a handful of bright napoleons in his pocket, joyfully boarded the train for Campoformio.

"I am *en train de faire ma fortune,*" he grinned, as he thought of the rosy future.

"Now! I am free!" Orton gladly cried as his advance guard left! "Let me think. Lieutenant Gordon commissions me to remove the remains of the lady who died at Campoformio last year, and was there buried, under the name of Isabel Percy. He has given me all the legal authorities, and directs the closest inquiry into every detail of her illness and death. I am to cable to his St. Louis Bank the receipt of my orders, and then a picture of the dead woman will be sent by them to aid my researches. The utmost secrecy and delicacy to be observed, and the whole commission to remain a private matter. Notify the Bank of St. Louis, and draw on them, sending needed telegrams to their care. Ah! what's this,—these crossed lines? 'I am going on an expedition, to be gone some months; I found out your foreign address from the Pinker-

tons; I rely entirely on you; and whatever you do, *never mention this to any American.'*

"What is his motive for secrecy? Interest, or shame? And which is Isabel Percy,—the dead woman, or the *'Mees Isabel'?* I have enough before me!"

Orton promptly telegraphed to the St. Louis Bank, and to the exchange in Paris, and gave his permanent address as Hôtel Chauvain. "I am now ready to see the little town where Napoleon humbled haughty Austria's pride in the treaty of 1797, near Udine. Where's Udine? Well, I will leave my orders for mail here, and make this my base of operations." Quick-witted Orton easily reached his goal in Venetia.

The inn-keeper of the "Golden Cross" at Campoformio was happy in bustling for the comfort of his liberal guest, who ordered the best accommodations in his house as he descended from the diligence. "Liberality pays,—*sometimes,"* thought Orton, as Josef deftly arranged all his new master's luggage.

In a carriage, the pride of the village, the impatient Orton soon reconnoitred the modest town. Passing the Campo Santo, without a remark, he noted Josef furtively gazing at its cypress-shaded walks. "I now know the lay of

the land," the detective thought. "After dinner I will open my batteries. Josef!" said Orton sharply, when he had leisurely sipped his last glass of Marsala, "tell me now all about this affair! What have you now to *say here?* I am pressed for time! Let us come to business."

"What have you to *pay here?*" quietly queried the valet.

"That depends on your information," the detective answered. "You had better tell me all; I will be liberal."

"Not less than a thousand francs!" Josef remarked, cautiously hedging.

"All right, if you don't lie: if you *do,* you get nothing. I may need you again."

"Well then, give me the money and I will take you to everybody; I will tell you the whole swindle!"

"On whom?" queried Orton, tantalizing Josef with a thousand-franc note, twirled before his nose.

"On the Capitaine Gordon, of the Cavalerie Américaine!" said the anxious servant.

Orton's eyes flashed one keen glance at him. "He's not lying!—There you are, Josef!" said Orton, quietly giving him the bill. "There's more for you in the future." Josef spoke out freely,

and Orton rapidly made his notes. He was overjoyed, yet maintained his habitual calm.

"You have told me you know how the 'Mees Isabel' got to Stahrenstein," said the valet. "You can guess what went on there, before Prince Demidoff and Baron Adolf came. But the 'Mees Isabel' was 'on guard,'—she was afraid? No, *not of the devil!* After I am two weeks at the Schloss, the old Graf calls me: 'Josef! You know Antonio Savelli, who was my old Intendant here, and is *now* in charge of my estates at Campoformio, and is the Syndic there!' It was true, for once a year the Graf went to see his great property here. I went with him always."

Orton started. Light was dawning on him. Josef resumed:—

"'Here are letters for Antonio,' said the Graf. 'Here is money. I have telegraphed him, you are coming. Stay with him till all is over! Do as he tells you! See the whole business well done! I shall reward you! Keep your mouth shut about it!' He was a kind master," sighed Josef. "He always *paid me well!*"

"And what *was* the business?" eagerly demanded Orton.

"I was directed to see Antonio, and then wait at a little town on the Austrian frontier, till

a coffin was to come by rail. When Syndic Antonio joined me, we were to have the funeral in the Catholic Church here!" Josef pointed from the window. "And I was to be one witness, and sign the papers and certificates for the Graf. I was to read all the other papers and sign, for the law requires two witnesses, and the Doctor Rastalli was one, —I was the other; and the Doctor, Savelli brought along. They would all die for the Graf! —The only one we had to deceive, was the old Priest. I went there as ordered; in one week, all was over! The old Priest grumbled at burying a heretic in consecrated ground. But," said Josef, "the Syndic Savelli gave him a new set of bells for the chuch. I saw the whole funeral. I know the grave!—It was a swindle on the Capitaine!"

"Why?" demanded Orton, now cool.

"Because it was *not* the 'Mees Isabel'—it was *another woman* who was buried."

"How do you know?" the detective asked.

"We have examined quietly,—the Syndic and myself,—only he and I know! The Doctor knew not. He would sign any papers for the Syndic. It was an old,—little old woman, from the Austrian border."

"And the rest?" Orton was eager.

"I had the letters, and the papers, and a diamond ring, the Graf had given me! *Magnifique!*" said he. "And we examined them. In the ring was the picture of the Capitaine Gordon, behind a blue shining stone,—a *saphir!* We had made a full legal *procès-verbal,* and the Doctor signed all, without a single look! All was then sent by the Syndic to the Capitaine Gordon, to the Bank of St. Louis. I obtained the legal papers and the receipts from the Poste Réale!—I copied all the names, and I know the Syndic also copied all the papers. He will not tell *you!* He will fear now! The great Graf is dead! Ah! Savelli is sly! He would go to prison for this."

"Well, afterwards?" Orton sharply asked.

"I took the certificates and papers Savelli gave me, back to the Graf. They were of the death of the Américaine lady, Isabel Percy,—of age twenty-three years. Also, that she died under the care of the Doctor, and requested the papers and goods to go to the Capitaine Gordon!"

"By Heaven! It was Gordon's *sister;* or his *wife!*" Orton ejaculated. "I see it now! The real Isabel Percy was drinking Tokay on the terrace at Stahrenstein, and laughing with her lover at her dead self. And on your return?"

He resumed: "All was gay! The Graf was

happy,—and the 'Mees Isabel' sent all her trunks and goods to the Bank at Paris. But first, they were sent to *this town!* I brought them over." Josef laughed.—"And I signed the papers, and the Syndic shipped them all to Paris."

"To whom?" asked Orton, with a growing disgust.

"To the Capitaine Gordon,—to the care of Bank of St. Louis! Ah! she was a smart one! The old Graf and the lovely woman would laugh, —oh,—so gaily laugh! I waited alone on their little *private* dinners at Stahrenstein. She is a cold-hearted human devil!"

Orton walked up and down the room. "This woman is a reckless fiend! Before she entered on her Carnival of Deviltry, she threw poor Gordon off the track! By Jove! I could strangle her myself! This is why Gordon *never came over!*— He is breaking his loyal heart at home, over this devilish modern Faustine! What shall I do? Well, I'll sleep anyway!

"Josef!" said Orton, "I am tired! To-morrow, you will show me the grave, and the church register. I will see the Priest, and the Syndic later! Don't let them know a word of my affairs. I want you to go to Stahrenstein for me! I will come over there in a week. You had

better be true to me! You might join the Syndic in prison."

"That is so," said the valet. "Count on me."

When the sun drove the mists away from the old grave-surrounded church, next day, Phineas Orton stood beside the humble mound,—roughly marked "Isabel Percy," with the inscribed date of her death.

"Very neat!" murmured Orton. "A sly trick!"

A wheezy old sacristan dragged out the bulky Registers; and wondered at the twenty-lire note handed him by the American. "A prince!" he piously ejaculated, as Orton carefully copied the entries. All was in regular order. Isabel Percy was legally *dead and buried!*

"It is an unholy swindle! A cold-blooded fraud! And what can I do? I will not break Gordon's heart! He is a thorough-bred! I will not write him; but I will nail the proofs of this graveyard imposture, and put it out of their power to *deny it!* I will send Josef over to the crags of Fürstenfeld! I must *now* work alone! Neither Jenks, Brayton, nor *Gordon himself* can check-mate me now! And where is the Masked Venus?" (Orton's blood was boiling at this cruel fraud.) "Carousing madly in Petersburg

with the Tartar Prince! Man, she seems to defy! I will leave her to the future! God will strike her down in her pride of sin! But I dare not *write* the lonely officer this disclosure!" he continued, cutting off the tall weeds with his cane; "I feel I should report in person! I must ponder over every side of this case.

"Has Gordon been strangely hoodwinked and deceived? Was he really an accomplice in the murder? Did this wily adventuress play on his feelings; or is he merely covering up a family scandal, and veiling the eyes of Justice? God alone knows!"

The next day, Josef, (after many further details of the merry days *à deux* at Stahrenstein,) hastened away to prepare the field. Orton had kept his own counsel. In a week he quietly presented his papers and orders from Gordon to the Syndic.

With an eager curiosity, the detective verified the fact that a shrivelled old woman,—a borderer,—of either Italian, Tyrolean, or Austrian blood, had been made the subject of the modest obsequies. It was a secret inspection. To the Pinkerton agent, (now co-operating with him in Paris,) Orton dispatched the remains of the supposed Isabel Percy. The case was sealed with

the Syndic's and notaries' official seals. A handsome douceur, "for the poor," caused the old Priest to bring out his crusty claret, and tell the whole story of the burial. Orton had every certificate and paper closing up the case. "I must leave Gordon in ignorance for the present. Probably this poor old beggar will sleep in Belvoir's vaults. It's *all the same!*"

Seated in front of the old Priest's modest house, gazing upon the glittering summits of the Noric Alps, Orton wondered if in all the wildly planned schemes of vice,—of lust, fraud, and red-handed murder, there was a single one which had not its *fatal slip*,—its faint clue, guiding the never-sleeping pursuer. "What is it?" he murmured. "Chance?—Fate?—Nemesis?—or the *will of God?*"

As he wandered over the strange paths which had led him to the little glebe of the old Priest, the soft stroke of the Angelus brought the Padre to his prayers. Orton, (uncovered,) watched the simple old ecclesiastic. "After all, *Faith alone brings peace and happiness!*" he thought.

"God help poor Gordon! God keep him! Innocent, or guilty, he is racking his heart over the wild woman, whose alias name is carved here as a cruel lie! Where is she now?"

Phineas Orton, (in his wildest dreams of romance,) dared not fancy that, (sparkling with jewels,) mad with wine, the Masked Venus, (in her daring *undress uniform,*) was clinking glasses with an Imperial Grand Duke of Russia, (Paul Demidoff's guest,) in the old granite "palace, fort, harem, or barrack" of the Demidoffs on the icy banks of the Neva; facing the stronghold where the tears of the helpless prisoners freeze on the stone cell floors of thè Fortress on the Island!

"I must go now!" he said, as he wrapped his cloak around him and bade the old Priest a courteous farewell, as the Padre hobbled off to his vespers.

Following the frail clue, dependent on a lying valet, and doubtful now, even of *his own* judgment, the detective departed for the wild Styrian passes, where lost Irene Gordon's smile had woven a thread of suggested murder in the matchless melody of her wonderful voice.

Alas! the tempted Adolf, and his princely victim, (a brother of the blood,) slept peacefully side by side "after life's fitful fever." No echo of the laughter of the wild-eyed star of Satan's choicest band, could wake their long unbroken sleep!

"It's a hard world!" thought Orton. "I

thought *I* once knew the worst woman in the world! Even *she* was an angel, to this incarnate fiend, 'The Masked Venus.'"

And where was the lovely fugitive? As the *Aphrodite* furled her silver sails at Odessa, Demidoff softly whispered to the captive Venus, "We are here,—at home,—*in Russia,*—my peerless one!—You must never leave me!"

The haughty beauty bent her head and whispered—"Can you chase away those past sorrows?"

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE PLAINS! FORT M'PHERSON IN WINTER! AN ENGLISH ROSE! MARGUERITE CALHOUN'S SECRET. IN THE BUFFALO COUNTRY! "STANDING OFF" THE SIOUX. THE WHISTLE IN THE BUSHES! IRON HEART, THE PAWNEE SCOUT. IN THE DUG-OUT! "KISS ME BEFORE YOU GO!" SERGEANT GAVAN O'BRIEN! MAXWELL'S SURRENDER.

First Lieutenant John Gordon, post Officer of the Day, was standing in two feet of snow at Fort McPherson, Nebraska, on January 1st, 1870, as he received the company reports at reveillé. The rolling hills were piled high with drifted snow banks. A miserably cheerless New Year's morning was ushered in by this six o'clock call. The bitter winds whistled madly down toward the lonely valley of the Platte! Far away over the rolling, treeless ridges to the south, hidden deep in the gullies of the Republican and Washita, the hunted Indians of the plains huddled in their skin tepees. Only a few score of miles separated the forces of the great "Uncle Sam"

and the war-like tribes, held together by the unbending chiefs of the Kiowas, Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and Comanches!

"*They* don't bother with reveillé, these natural warriors!" grumbled Gordon, as he toiled back to his quarters, through bitter gusts of icy winter winds. The blizzard driving the whirling snow high in air, tore down from the Black Hills and swept the valleys of the Platte and Republican with ferocious keenness.

"I believe the Indians are nearer to the right system than we are. *We* vex and torture our men with every useless formality, and a nonsensical routine. *They* certainly have the *right* of this frontier quarrel! We are robbing them of broad lands, of the great buffalo supply, and each year sees these gallant nomads driven to personal retaliation and individual murder in order to revenge these tribal wrongs! If I were not *bound in honor,* and *sworn in law,* to serve four years as an army officer, to repay my West Point education, I believe I would be a better soldier, and nearer the right, if I joined Lone Wolf, or Satanta to-morrow!"

The old Fort, built to protect the emigrants toiling along the Platte, was a great quadrangle

of assorted wooden buildings, perched on some bald hills jutting out into the valley, and looking north and west. A few hundred feet lower, the shallow Platte wound along, (a score of miles away,) broken with its osier and willow-shaded islands, and now frozen solid. Several companies of Infantry, — the main body of the "Fifth Cavalry,"—and a squadron of the "Seventh," served to overawe the Indians within striking distance. These audacious brown devils occasionally swooped around, gathering up a few travellers, or mail carriers, and were only waiting now for the spring grass to fatten their ponies, so that the young braves could again attack the cavalrymen, worn out with detachment warfare! Some thirty or forty officers, (many of them married), made up a jovial social circle, and the telegraph and daily mail, with the nearness of the railroad, served to keep up interest in the far-away eastern world. Several young ladies, (graceful visitors from the friendly circles), heightened the humdrum daily life of the isolated garrison.

In the barracks, the soldiers, comfortably housed, assiduously practised every game known to the science of cards, and sullenly broke "the regulations," as often as possible, "on general principles." . . . A hundred lithe, bright-eyed, loyal

Pawnee scouts, under command of handsome "Buffalo Bill" Cody, lingered around. They were a sort of protective buffer against the Sioux and Cheyennes. Stripped to the waist, arrayed in defiant scalplock, and hideous with war-paint, they continued that hundred-year duel to the death with the great Sioux nation, which has almost extinguished the gallant and fearless Pawnees. Pushed by the whites across the Missouri, the Pawnees were "welcomed to hospitable graves" by their mortal enemies, the unforgiving Sioux; and yet the unyielding warriors rode gaily out with the Regular Cavalry, in hopeless bravery, on the annual summer scouts!

At this important post, courtly General Everett, (a Division General of the war Volunteers,) *now* a Colonel Commanding, of Regulars, kept open house in his traditonal fashion. High bred and haughty, the soul of honor, crusty and sound—like ancient Port—he was a frosted relic of the "Old Army." A widower, his merry daughters liked to slyly pamper the old military flirt, with the daily incense offered up to him by several visiting young beauties. These pretty damsels, their romantic hearts thrilled with the spice of danger in being "in the Indian country," practised their social fascinations on the smart

Captains, and rising subalterns, not yet chained by Hymen.

The General's "heavy dinners," at which "the war" was interminably re-fought by the old veteran,—the fortnightly "Hop," and various small efforts at novel social excitements, made up the fashionable diversions of "Officers' Row." In all these bewildering splendors, the stern unmoved reticence and ceremonious reserve of First Lieutenant John Gordon of the Seventh, was generally remarked. "By Jove! *I* was not such an anchorite, in my youth!" the old General growled to his pouting daughters at breakfast on this New Year's morning. "Gordon is rich,—of a fine family,—and a superb soldier! I wonder that he does not unbend!"

"Papa!" said Miss Flossie Everett, the pet of the Fort, "Lieutenant Gordon is just *splendid!* But he is *so reserved!* He reads and studies all the time! He joins liberally in keeping up all the officers' hospitalities, but he persistently avoids the ladies! I think he is a real woman-hater! And yet, his *men* love him so! He is just a mystery,—that's all,—a handsome mystery!" said Miss Flossie, as she absently scratched the name "Gordon" with a pink finger-nail, on the frosted

window pane. "If he was in 'Ours' I'd *make him behave!*"

"I will draw him out sometime! I must have a talk with him!" said the old General. "I knew his dead father,—a splendid Mexican war officer! Gordon has a beautiful home in Kentucky!"

"Papa!" said laughing Flossie, "you dear old goose! *You* can't draw him out! Why, neither Rose Durnsford nor Marguerite has ever brought a smile to his lips! He's a regular — 'old bachelor!'" said the hoyden, as she ran away to join the last-named beauties.

"I've just been talking with Papa about Lieutenant Gordon! The dear old Chief is going to ask him to dinner, and draw him out! We will open a regular siege upon this lonely man! Why! they tell me he was a great ladies' man at the 'Point,' a Hop Manager, and all that!" So rattled on pretty Flossie Everett, as she burst in upon Rose Durnsford and Marguerite Calhoun, in the music room.

"We may as well give up this duet, Marguerite!" said fair Rose Durnsford; "Chatterbox will give us no rest!" she said, gazing fondly at the glowing girl.

"And is he *really* such a hero?" said Marguerite Calhoun, with a sweep of her sparkling

brown eyes. "He has *quite* a distinguished air, I admit! Beware of *your* heart, Miss Flyaway! *Seven* is a magic number, you know!"

"Oh! I will never marry out of the 'Fifth!' I am going to be Colonel of my dear father's old regiment."

"How?" cried the astonished listeners.

"Oh! I will wait till we have a handsome Major of 'Ours,' then, I will marry *him*. Promotion will carry *him* up to the Colonelcy! I will *command him;* and *that* will make me the real *Colonel of the Fifth Cavalry!*" The young madcap delivered this bit of military strategy, with all seriousness, and springing to the piano, dashed into the "Bride of the Winds" Galop.

Marguerite Calhoun, (a distant relative, and ward of General Everett's,) had left her manor, "Fair Oaks," in Maryland to make a home acquaintance with the General's daughters. Sweet and serious, her earnest nature and graceful composure, told of the training of the gentle Nuns of the Visitation, at Georgetown; the Alma Mater of the patrician Catholic maidens of the Atlantic. A tinge of the personal dignity of the southern woman, gave her an ascendency over mad Flossie and her more staid sister Maud,—both spoiled darlings.

"I wonder what he is really like!" Marguerite mused. "The Gordons are a fine old Kentucky race. He seems to have *some* occupations higher than *cards*, and the attractions of the mess-room *buffet*."

"Rose! shall we surround him, (in a hollow-hearted square,) and force him to surrender? For Flossie gives him over to our bow and spear! How about Maud?"

"Maud will marry, *also*, in the 'fighting Fifth!'" said that young lady, in a resolute voice, from the little writing room adjoining.

"Then Rose! *you* and *I* must draw lots for this great military prize!"

"Ah! Don't mind *me!*" pleasantly replied the English Rose. "I like your wonderful country, and such dear friends, but I fancy old England's lawns and hawthorn hedges too much to live so far away. So *you* can draw both the lots! But what will the *doomed man* say?" Rose Durnsford merrily laughed.

Sweet fair-faced English girl, she waited the return of her father, Robert Durnsford, a world-renowned English steel manufacturer, who was intent on spending a few years among the winter glories of Southern California. In another year, the millionaire Briton designed turning over his

practical affairs to Harold, (his only son,) now "doing the world" on an extensive tour. The great house of Durnsford had its business connections with nearly every foreign government. Young Harold was roving around the globe, and making personal acquaintances with their numerous agents.

"Ah! I see!" said Marguerite, mischievously. "When you meet Harold at San Francisco, he will bring over some one of his friends! Some English Lord, or one of the 'country people' of your own land!"

"Never mind! I make you a present of the irrresistible Mr. Gordon! I can wait!" smiled Rose. "And I am sure he really can't resist *you!* You are both 'Southerners,' you know!"

"Then it is settled! His fate is sealed!" laughed Marguerite; as Flossie Everett, with mock congratulations, hailed her as the coming "married beauty" of the Seventh Cavalry.

"But now, we must hasten with our magic arts! The officers will commence soon their calls. *"Allons à la toilette!"* cried the giddy Flossie, disappearing with a flourish.

General Everett was preparing, in his stately fashion, to hold "open house" for the whole garrison. This, and inspecting the men's New Year's

dinner, freed him from his social obligations. The unsuspecting object of the merry conspiracy of the four beauties, sat in his lonely quarters, belted and sashed, with his father's sword at his side. Officer of the Day, he was every moment of the twenty-four hours on duty. He sat, poring over a letter from Maxwell.

"So! Dear old Vinton will be down here in a couple of months! I will have him near me. Can I tell him all?" Jack Gordon's handsome face was lined with stern touches here and there. Frontier dangers, hardships and scouting, as well as his repressed sorrows, aged him, and gave to his noble face that nameless air of trials past, which awakes curiosity and excites sympathy.

"I must *face* this thing *now,*" he thought, throwing down the letter. "I am glad I am on this detached service! It keeps off the friendly intrusion of my own regimental friends; especially the ladies! God bless them all for their goodness to me! I have yet two years to serve! I have nearly a *year to wait,* before I can break my promise to my dead darling! Can I tell Maxwell *anything?* I cannot treat him like the others! He shall know all! But when?"

An hour wore on. Gordon attended to his roll calls, and inspections. "Now, I am through

with this drudgery, till evening parade!" he rejoined, laying cap, cloak, and sabre on the furred couch, ready for any instant summons. "I must step over and 'report' an official New Year welcome to dear old General Everett. He's a fine old warrior!" Jack gazed at his now severely shadowed face in the mirror. "Not the Jack Gordon of old! No! Not the same now! Never to be *the same again!*" and he dropped into revery.

"I have it! I will wait for Orton's full returns about his commission," he mused, with a sigh; "and when the time is out, I will tell Maxwell all! And *only* him! An oath to the *dead* is as binding as one to the *living!*" He arose and gazed upon a picture! It was one he had worshipped under starlight, by the camp fire, and carried past the deadly Sioux's ambush, and in many desperate junctures. It showed him the face of the vanished Irene! "My own lost one! You shall come back at last to your country!" Jack Gordon, gazing at the whirling snow flakes, could not foresee *how* lost Irene Gordon would *come back* to her native land! The mystic future has its mercies in the veil which hides it sometimes from loving and longing eyes.

"Well! I will welcome Maxwell heartily, if he

comes down on this tour of exploring the Republican, and our outlying trails. I can at least show him all the *buffalo* and *Indians* he will care to see! I must go over and make my bow! What shall I do after '72? By Heaven! If there was any foreign service, I would like to see some great modern war! But I could not offer my sword to any alien land!" Gordon knew not that the crash of the Third Empire was near at hand; that the wild whirl of the Franco-Prussian War would soon tie up beleaguered Paris; and that Phineas Orton's *"commission"* would be forced to wait, till peace would permit the sending forth of the mortal remains of "Isabel Percy" to the land of her birth.

Aided by Jackson, Lieutenant Gordon gave a few brightening touches to his simple regulation uniform, and followed by his orderly, went out to face the General, and the "bright-eyed banditti" surrounding him; for the four fair conspirators were now in their best "war paint and feathers," receiving the hearty greetings of their genial fellow-hermits, in the snow-bound fort.

As stately Gordon bowed his head before the brown-eyed Maryland heiress in passing in review, there was a crimson blush on her sweet face. "He is truly the beau ideal of a soldier," thought

the Border beauty; and catching a quizzical look on the face of saucy Flossie, in her post of honor, at the "left of the line," Marguerite Calhoun dropped her eyes; for she remembered the gay plot of the morning!

"That's a sweet, true-looking woman!" Jack Gordon mused, as he made his excuses to the General.

"Duty, you know! General!" said the Officer of the Day, glancing at his diagonal sash, the mark of temporary power.

"Ah! yes! Mr. Gordon!" said the hearty veteran. "And, by the way, consider yourself *'under orders'* to report here at dinner on Wednesday! I can't have the 'Seventh' complain of the 'Fifth's' *inhumanity* to one of their mess! Besides, our fair garrison needs protection!"

Gordon smiled as he accepted. He caught a kindly glance from Marguerite Calhoun's earnest, tender eyes. "I'd like to have that gentle-looking woman—*for a sister!*" he thought, as he clanked away to his lonely quarters.

"All this would be *so* different, if Irene,—if *my own darling* had not died," he thought, as he looked at his silent rooms. On the hearth the fire was dying! "Love's extinguished embers," he thought. "What has Life in store for me now?"

Week after week drifted by in winter routine. Lieutenant Gordon was soon voted an intimate of the General's family. The dinner, which he had "officially" attended, served to break the icy crust of his reserve. Drawn day by day into the friendly circle, he felt a serene safety in the numbers of the fair châtelaines. "There is no possibility of singling *one* out of this pretty quartette!" he mused. Still, as the spring wore on, it was always Marguerite Calhoun, who walked the parade at Band Practice, with the cavalryman. Books, and her music; long talks of the varied interests common to them, (as of southern blood,) and bits of character glimpses, (revealed, here and there, in some unwonted mood,)—all these things drew them nearer.

Jack Gordon was almost cheerful; for in his heart he felt he had found a sisterly friend. Maxwell was coming down from Omaha in two months to begin his explorations. "I shall apply for *you,* dear old boy," wrote the Division Engineer officer, "to command my escort. It will bring us together for three months!"

"This will be royal!" thought Gordon; "and yet it breaks up my engagement to teach Miss Marguerite to ride!" He could not yet see that life was taking on a new interest; but still in the

young blood, and glowing promise of early manhood, he was insensibly drawing away from his sadness!

As the moonlight streamed in through her windows, and silvered the distant valley, where the tender leaves of spring were now budding on osier and willow, in these peacefully gliding days, Marguerite Calhoun gazed out often on the starry night. "Does he love me? Will he *ever* speak? Do I then *love him?*" The tender woman whispered this question to herself, and *dared* not say "Nay!" Her mingled hopes and fears would not permit her to whisper, even in her heart of hearts, "Yea!"—for locked within her gentle breast, *this* was now sweet Marguerite Calhoun's secret. Her beautiful brown eyes were brighter in their liquid light, when the tall young Kentuckian walked at her side, or bent over her piano.

April came, and the old Fort was now a busy hive. From forge and quartermaster shops, busy hammers announced the repairs to train and gear.—The strong herd guard, (now doubled,) led the regimental horses out to crop the tender grasses within easy reach. Smart drills and exercises brought up the activity of the troops.—A general overhauling of campaign outfit was going

on all over the Post. For any day now, some daring spring raid of the long-haired young Sioux warriors, might spread havoc along the line of the Platte. Dearer than the proud distinction of the "Sun Dance," was the *first scalp* taken on the war-path by these young Ishmaels! To retake the path of effectiveness, daily target practice was held. Strong hunting parties of soldiers were sent out.—The main roads were patrolled; and the band of Pawnee braves, splendidly mounted and heavily armed, donned their streaked war paint and twisted up their scalp locks as defiantly, as when their fathers fought the Delawares to the death in bygone years, or battled in the great fight fifteen years before, with their hereditary foes, the grim Sioux.

Bison and antelope were now thronging the rolling ground to the south, and herds of great black-tail deer and wild elk, fled to the cañons, from the rapacious hunter. A half-dozen renowned white scouts were with their intrepid leader, "Buffalo Bill," and watched over the rash Pawnees in their whirling raids fifty miles around the Fort! The more dashing young officers joined these informal reconnoissances. Jack Gordon's blooded chargers were chafing for the field, and while waiting for Maxwell's advent, the

Kentuckian made himself thoroughly a master of the topography, as far as the parties ranged afield. The ladies of the Post began to plume their wings for little flights. Occasional rides, (under strong escort,)—now and then a trip to the railroad station at North Platte, and some desultory visiting of points of local interest, made up their only possible distractions. For, gully and cañon, knoll and ravine, often hid sly, hostile, Sioux scouts; crawling up to points of vantage to watch for small parties.

Even the mail parties of three resolute men sometimes had a run for their lives. Gordon's "riding lessons" were usually under protection of a heavy squad of the herd guard,—a troop on its daily exercise, or surrounded by a band of the weird-looking, but loyal Pawnees.

Marguerite Calhoun, (graceful and spirited,) soon learned to love these occasional "object lessons." By a strange fancy, one of the young Pawnee Chiefs attached himself individually to the gentle Maryland girl. "Iron Heart" was the pride of his branch of the tribe! Tall, graceful, and with rounded limbs, he sat his horse like a conqueror. Plumed was his proud head,—painted grimly his face,—and with richest, gaily fringed leggings, his whole outfit was that of a young

Chief, *par excellence.* His buckskin rifle-case, rich belt with heavy pistols, and all his belongings, bespoke the Chief of rank. Superbly mounted, he would linger near Gordon's fair charge; his roving dark eye glittering as he admired the lovely pale-face. Many an antelope, fat haunch of venison, or beaver skin, did he offer as rude indications of his mute worship.

On hunting forays with Gordon, Iron Heart would watch closely over the manly Kentuckian, admiring his prowess and unerring aim. Far to the south, among even the hostiles, the fame of Iron Heart was noised abroad! His ability as a guide, his prowess in the field, and his unmatched skill as a hunter, made him a favorite with the officers of the Fort. The Sioux coveted his scalp in return for several of their own dead!—

"I must have *him* if I take Maxwell through the Indian country!" thought the Kentuckian. For Jack Gordon waited daily now for his friend.

"This is like old times!" cried Gordon, as Vinton Maxwell sprang from the "ambulance," on a bright May morning, in front of Gordon's quarters. The eager friends were soon in full exchange of their experiences! Gordon, (warned by telegram,) had already arranged all the details of escort and outfit for the projected explorations

and surveys. A half company of troopers, a couple of wagons, a dozen Pawnees, with Iron Heart at their head, and two reliable white plainsmen, awaited the orders of the young Engineer.

After the official call of ceremony, whereat Maxwell met the beautiful quartette of General Everett's household, the classmates were soon deep in plans for the future, and loving remembrance. Cautious Maxwell eyed Jack Gordon keenly, and refrained from references to the shadows of the past.

"I will let Gordon speak! If he does not open up the old matters, I can wait! I have enough on my hands!" the Engineer decided.

Two weeks of preparation passed by. Courtly General Everett placed all local facilities at the disposal of the young staff officer. Maps, reports, scouts, and wise suggestions, were furnished by the veteran commander. The important special service was discussed and laid out. In the intervals of this occupation Vinton Maxwell became a feature of the General's household. Fresh from Department Headquarters, he was a treasure to the General, whose army gossip was thus brought down to a late date. Over the table, Maxwell learned the General's pet feats of arms, and, (stealing away to the circle of Graces,) was a

pleasant re-inforcement to the sighing swains of the garrison.

It was not strange that the acute young Engineer should find a charm in the sparkling blue eyes of Rose Durnsford. Her lovely fresh English face was brighter to him than Aurora, herald of the rosy hours. In the little riding parties, Maxwell soon ceased to observe Gordon's growing intimacy with Marguerite Calhoun. He was wondering how long the fair English lass would linger; for Horace Durnsford's return would end his daughter's frontier experience. The General's daughters were victorious in inducing Marguerite to remain until they would all return to "Fair Oaks." General Everett was looking now for an extended leave. A "Washington winter" was a grateful prospect to the old soldier.

Maxwell's expedition was ready at last. The two friends sat together the night before their departure. Gordon, (still without news of Orton,) was reticent. With silent surprise, Maxwell noted that Gordon had *never* mentioned Beverly Seaton's name! By the fire, the young officers pondered over their plans.

"See here!" said Maxwell, "Jack! we must go over and take our leave of the General and his ladies! If we march to-morrow, we should

be miles away before the young 'autocrats' gather around 'the breakfast table'!"

"That is true!" assented Jack Gordon. They walked down to the General's quarters. Maxwell was heavy at heart. "I shall probably not see Rose again," he mused, as he singled out the divinity of his choice. "She will go on to California when her father arrives, in a few weeks. Must I lose her so soon?" There was a tinge of sadness in their last evening. Maxwell, with ingenuity, persuaded Miss Rose to an evening walk; while Gordon lingered in converse with Marguerite Calhoun. Flossie slyly gave the departing soldiers a fair field.

It was only in taking leave that Maxwell, happy in the promise of a correspondence with the English Rose, noted the expression of Marguerite's face, as she clasped hands with Gordon in good-bye. In the depths of these kindly brown eyes was a yearning woman's solicitude. Gordon was going forth on the prairie sea, to face unknown dangers, and savage enemies, relentless in ferocity. "Would he return?"

As the friends sat down in the quiet of their quarters, Maxwell, (led on by an irresistible impulse,) seized Jack's hands. "Why do you not marry that loving girl, Jack?" he cried.

"What do you mean?" said Gordon in blank amazement.

"Can you not *see* that Marguerite Calhoun has given you her whole heart? She loves you, if *ever* a man was loved by woman!" Gordon paced the room with rapid strides. Seizing Maxwell by the shoulder, he gravely said:

"We have been comrades for years, Vinton; I ask you but one thing now! Do not speak of marriage to me! My God! you don't know what you are saying!"

"And you have led this woman on to *loving* you! Her heart is already yours!" Maxwell resolutely answered.

"I cannot talk to you," said Gordon bitterly. "I may, some day, but not now! Not even to you! May Heaven grant that your words are a mere wild fancy! You see what has *no existence!* Let us sleep! To-morrow we are off! Good-night, old fellow!" said Gordon sadly, as he sought refuge in silence. The shade of lost Irene haunted his pillow.

"Can there be hanging over Jack some memory of the past?" The mysterious quarrel with Beverly Seaton returned to Maxwell, who tossed uneasily; for sleep fled his eyes. It was late when the returning vision of the English

Rose chased from his tired brain the dark shadows hanging over his friend's strange past. "Gordon has not told me all! What is there on his mind?" and Vinton Maxwell dreamed of the dainty Rose.

The singing bugles woke them to the departure. Already, in the dawn, the command awaited them. Forth, in silence they marched to the presence of their never-sleeping foes, and as Maxwell cast a last glance at the quiet "Officers' Row," he wondered if he should ever see Rose Durnsford's beloved face again.

Gordon, riding ahead, with Iron Heart, (as an aid,) led on the command.

"I must see Jack Gordon *right this wrong!* This tender woman who loves him, is the one of all most fitted to make him happy! It must be! Time will bring it out all right!"

They little knew that *two* anxious women watched the heavily armed cavalcade draw out! That tears were sparkling on Marguerite Calhoun's lashes; and, sheltered behind her casement, fair Rose Durnsford pressed her trembling hands over her innocent heart. "If I could only say *one word,* one *little word* to him!" The command wound slowly down, and the rolling cañons

hid the officers from the last glances of these loving eyes.

Three months later a weary cavalcade toiled up toward Diamond Spring, twenty miles from Fort McPherson. In advance rode a trio of the Pawnee scouts, and, (on the flanks and rear,) the other warriors hung. With wolfish eyes and strained ear, Jack Gordon and Maxwell rode side by side. At Gordon's bridle rein the restless eyed Iron Heart keenly watched his snaky outriders, far in advance. The men, jaded and anxious, scanned every hill top. Carbines were at a poise, and the one remaining wagon creaked wearily along. Within it lay a worn-out sick man, and by his side, the form of a soldier messenger, who had found the party on the south fork of the Republican, and brought a Sioux arrow in with him,—the steel head deep buried in his side!

"Come in *at once!* Heavy war parties to our south! Use *every precaution.*" Such was the positive order, signed "Everett."

The two companions of the wounded trooper were a welcome re-inforcement. On the last wagon was piled the baggage, instruments, and records; with all the extra rations the men could not handle. The reserve ammunition was loaded

on the troopers' horses, and two pack horses carried the last reserve; *one* with the carbine ammunition, and *the other* with the Winchester cartridges of the scouts, plainsmen, and officers.

"If we have to make a break for it, we'll put the two sick men on the pack horses, with a trooper at each side, and get into the Fort, or stand the Indians off on high ground!"

"Thank Heaven! we're nearly out of danger now, Jack," said Maxwell, who had packed, in his saddle bags, the note books of three months' exploration of the county. Land, rivers, sites for Forts, railroad passes, natural features, and a full reconnoissance and rough triangulation. All these would busy the Engineer at Fort Sanders all winter.

"Thank God," said Jack Gordon. "Vinton! if they get *us,* they *never* can plot your notes!" He doubted the Sioux geometry!

Maxwell recalled Iron Heart's scorn of the land measuring. "Injin goes anywhere! S'pose no know?" said the haughty Chief.

The bundles of letters, brought out by the party, were dear to both the classmates. While Maxwell furrowed his brow over a letter from Beverly Seaton, Gordon was nonplussed at one from Phineas Orton. The friends who had shared

the prairie bed concealed this correspondence. Gordon's silence was yet unbroken. Seaton wrote from the old Virginia home: "I am back here, Maxwell! I am going to South America on a long voyage. If anything happens to me, Colonel Lomax has a sealed package for you. Please send Lomax your letters for me. Remember me kindly to Jack Gordon, if you see him!" That was all.

"Well, I will bring up this matter gently at the Fort; if we *ever get there,*" resolved Maxwell.

Jack Gordon was harassed with the news of the Franco-Prussian War. "I am cut off here in Austria; the war closes all travel. I will report *in person*, when I get through. Your 'commission' will be delayed by the inability to handle anything now, in and out of Paris. Our local agent will take care of all, and I will report to Inspector Walling. You must see me *personally*. —ORTON."

But each of the officers, as they rode up the swell toward Diamond Springs, held over his heart a treasured letter. Jack Gordon already knew by heart the words of Marguerite Calhoun, and Maxwell was thrilled with the sentences of "bashful maiden art" penned by the English beauty,—the Rose he worshipped now! There

was no interchange of confidence. "Do try and *come back* before we go *west!*" Rose Durnsford wrote. "My father will be here soon, and I *must not* say 'good-bye' *by letter.*"

As the cavalcade toiled along, Gordon was communing seriously with Iron Heart. "S'pose catchum Injin,—catchum *here!* Bime-by too near fort! Good water! Plenty Injin come here!"

Jack Gordon pondered over Iron Heart's words. He reined up by the ambulance. Rafferty, (the wounded man,)—painfully answered his queries. He was an old soldier.

"I'm doubtful of these brown devils, Lieutenant! They *whirled around* and struck *us below* here! Now if they made their ould 'figure of eight,' they might twist in *between us here* an' the fort! An' I hope to God, the young ladies didn't go up to North Platte to meet the old English gentleman coming!"

"Who was going up?" said Gordon, now alarmed.

"Sure, Miss Rose, an' that sweet lady, Miss Calhoun!—Lieutenant Ashford was a takin' them up, with an ambulance an' ten men. An they would meet a strong war party, they could aisily

be overpowered! The ladies has no place in an Injin fight," the anxious soldier groaned.

Riding back to the head of the column, Gordon ordered a slow walk. "I'll have the animals in good shape! If I can only get safely to this spring and fill our canteens and tank, then I'll draw ahead and camp off the road. I'll make a 'dry camp' and a straight run in."

In ten minutes, the long rolling divide was before them. The yellow sun hung lazily, an hour high, above the far western horizon.

"Maxwell!" said Gordon, as he noted Iron Heart bending over his pony's neck and shading his eyes, intently watching his advance, "take command! Be on the alert! I'll ride ahead with Iron Heart and see if the spring is clear! Here's the last place for a jump! After this, we're safe!" Jack Gordon spurred his splendid horse on, as Iron Heart whirled around and threw up his hand. The advance scouts were dashing like mad down the right side of the gully, in full retreat!

"Heaps Injins!" cried Iron Heart, jerking out his Winchester from under his leg. "Get up on top hill! Quick!"

"Follow, on the run, to the hill!" yelled Gor-

don. "Send *half* the men up!" as Maxwell shouted for the train to dash on.

Racing side by side, Gordon and Iron Heart dashed up to the clump of low bushes, below which a clear runlet trickled out to join the muddy Arkansas!—A hundred and fifty yards away, a line of yelling mounted Sioux were sweeping along the crest of the ridge in a mad race for the high ground.

"Dismount!" shouted the Kentuckian. "Over the ridge with the horses! Fight on foot!" And before the nearest Sioux was within seventy-five yards, Gordon, Iron Heart, and the three Pawnees, were coolly pouring in a leaden rain of bullets from their Winchester rifles.

Toiling up the pass, under fire, the remainder of the command, led by Maxwell, drew up under cover of the squad, now augmented by the men who had covered their horses behind the slope.

"Lift these sick men out!" Gordon commanded. "Take them over the ridge! Now, Maxwell! *Heave over the wagon!* Shoot those mules!" The baffled Indians fell back a few yards!

"Quick! For God's sake! Maxwell!" said Jack, as he posted his men in a circle. With blankets and packs, the two disabled men were

quickly sheltered by a roll of the hill. "Look out for those pack horses!" Gordon screamed, as *one* dashed away towards the Indians. A volley from the Sioux was the instant answer; which dropped two men!

"Cut that *other* horse's throat! Throw him!" cried Gordon. "Now, men, we're in for it! Fire slow and steady! Save your ammunition! Pick your men!

"Shoot that *loose horse!* He's got our last ammunition on him! All hands fire at him!" Gordon ordered, as the faithless beast struggled towards the enemy; now dismounted and crawling up in every direction. A sharp volley rang out, and the runaway animal dropped in his tracks. The fire was now biting and deadly,—an individual series of duels. "They can do *no better,* Gordon!" called out Bill Staples, the white scout.

"Then, *we can fight them a year!*" Jack yelled, as the men cheered!

"Luftenant! He have the Winchester cartridges on him, that devil!" said Corporal Doyle, pointing to the dead horse, and he twisted a handkerchief around his bleeding arm. "This is only for the *carbine* we have here!" said he, holding out the packages. It *was* the "single shooter" ammunition!

"My God! Our *best* guns will soon be useless!" Gordon groaned. For the *scouts,* the *Pawnees,* and the *officers,* all carried the repeating Winchesters. The carbine cartridges would not fit the quick-firing guns. One or two wounded men were throwing up dirt, stones, and bushes, behind the dead mules and the overturned ambulance. The men's packs were bundled here and there along the growing line of the trench.

"They'll cut us off as soon as it's dark!" said the Corporal; "an' *all* them devils carries Winchesters! There's five hundred rounds in them saddle-bags! They'll get it! That'll be our death!"

Jack Gordon cast a last glance at the dying sun! The men were firing regularly with coolness; save one poor devil who lay behind a tree, shivering in abject nervous terror. He had never seen an Indian in fight, and the yells paralyzed him.

"They are gathering up for another rush! They'll circle us and take us in the rear!" Maxwell said, as he strained his eye over his rifle to catch a rising head. He pulled the trigger, and grimly said: "There's *one* good Indian!"

"See here, Daly!" said Gordon, seizing an old "buffalo hunter," "take *my Winchester,* and *cover*

me! You *do the same,* Maxwell!" Jack loosened his revolver, and took his heavy knife, slung by a cord, in his left hand.

"Where are you going? Are you mad?" Maxwell cried.

"I'm going to have *those cartridges,*" the Kentuckian quietly answered.

"Jack! Let *me* go! I am second in command!" Maxwell shouted, his face ablaze.

"No man living can take *my* duty! Goodbye, old boy! I don't care for life! Iron Heart will take you in! Fight them *to the last man!*" and throwing off his coat and belt, Gordon, bareheaded, jumped over the barricade into the open and dashed down the slope!—A ringing volley answered the yells and shouts of the Indians, who could not believe their eyes. Was it an invincible "medicine man"? A madman?

Beside Jack Gordon, the lithe form of Iron Heart, revolver in one hand, and his long scalping knife in the other, raced towards the dead horse! Down the slope, three Sioux braves darted from the other side. Gordon stumbled and fell at the side of the dead horse. Knife in hand, he cut away, as a hasty volley glanced over him. The three foremost Indians were now within ten feet! Jack, drawing his keen knife over the flap

of the saddle bags, heard Iron Heart's revolver ring out, as the two leading braves stumbled and fell dead. Springing to his feet, Jack opened fire on the other. Like wild beasts, a half-dozen troopers sprang down the slope, and Gordon, (half dragged, half carried,) was safely once more behind the breastworks!—The Winchester cartridges were saved! a priceless treasure now!

Iron Heart was bending over him. "S'pose fightum *now* all night! Got *plenty* cartridge. Good!" Beside him, Vinton Maxwell, on his knees, was crying like a child.

"Are we all right?" Jack murmured, still dazed with his fall. The Seventh Cavalry crimson tie waved defiantly at his neck! It was a duel to the death!

"Yes! all but poor Brady, an' he's *layin' out there alone!*—beside *that damned horse!*" said private Daly, as he regularly worked Jack's Winchester.

"Are the canteens filled yet?" whispered Jack.

"All right!" said Maxwell.

"*Then*, we must hold our fire and stand them off! We can sneak out at night and get in to the Fort. They won't dare to run in on us in the dark!

"Ah! That's the worst; they are firing on *our*

rear!" cried Gordon, (now on his feet,) as Maxwell encouraged the men. "They are working *around us!* They want to kill all the *horses* before dark! Get all the rest of the horses up here in a circle!" And while a few steady men held the enemy at bay, all the animals were ranged around the ambulance, and hidden behind the trees. The two helpless men were protected now, with the others behind the mound of dead horses, loose earth, and baggage.

"Thank God!" said Gordon, as the night closed in darkly; for the fire of the Indians slowly ceased. They were baffled! "We have *nine* horses left!" Alas! Seven of the thirty men, lay silent, their fixed eyes glaring at the pitiless stars; and the groans of other suffering brave men broke the silence of the night! Jack Gordon's eyes blazed with the light of battle.

"But we *beat them off!* Maxwell!" Gordon proudly said.

"What shall we do? Let us talk it over!" cried Maxwell; as the men were eating a cold supper. Not a light,—not a spark of fire was permitted! The ammunition was equalized, and the arms of the dead were laid at hand for use. Every man had a revolver in addition to his gun.

The wolfish spirit of the white man "at bay" animated every one.

"Sure! he's *a dandy!*" said the Sergeant, as he crawled over to join the conference of the officers, the two white scouts, and Iron Heart. It was brief!

"S'pose I catchum good horse,—*your horse,*" Iron Heart, the Pawnee, simply said. "I make *good run,* I bring plenty soldier! I get back by daylight!" He was as cool as if wandering over the Fort.

"*That's* the scheme! Lieutenant!" said the stout Sergeant, who thought of the *seven dead men!* "I don't want to leave these dear boys to those scalping devils! They shall have dacint burial, if we do die here! An' we'll stay with you to the last drop of our hearts' blood!"

Gordon said: "Mike! *you're the right sort!*"

"I think I had better send a couple of men along!" said Gordon. "It's a good plan! Let Iron Heart run the trip! Look over the freshest horses. He can take *mine!*"

While they debated, the sighing night winds moaned around. Suddenly from the bushes on the right, below the spring, came the faint whistle of "Garry Owen." the Seventh's famous march. Was it a snare; a devilish invention?

"Silence!" commanded Gordon. Again that low sound. The rollicking tune was soft as a night bird's wail. "Here! four or five of you! Sergeant, bring that man in! It's surely some poor fellow cut off! One of the herd guards who has lost his way!" The whole party stood to arms. In a few minutes the party crawled back.

"Well, Phil!" said Gordon, as one of his old troopers wearily threw himself on the ground behind the line.

"Lieutenant! darlin'! *Listen to me,* av ye've a heart in yer body! I'm sore hurt! I knew ye would camp at the spring av ye were alive! It's a ride for life ye have before ye!"

"What is it? Out with it!" Gordon almost screamed with a sinking heart!

"They've corralled poor Ashford, and what's *left* of ten men, in the old dug-out, at the forks, ten miles from the Fort. When they jumped us, I fell out of me saddle! They chased the rest up there! I lay in the long grass, and me ould horse wandered back to me! I got out on the low ground, and came out behind the rolling buttes. I'd sooner starve, than be scalped. I knew I could call ye up with 'Garry Owen!' I heard you firin', an' I hid till them divils drew off! Me horse is below there in the cañon!"

"Can't Ashford stand them off?"

"Ah!" the soldier said. "The sweet ladies! God protect them, an' they've no food or water!"

"What!" yelled *both* the officers.

"Miss Rose an' the Maryland lady!" said the wounded man, sinking back in a dead faint.

Jack Gordon sprang to his horse. "My God! Ashford's only a youngster and has *never* been under fire yet!" Jack was throwing the saddle on the big fresh Kentucky charger. Never a gentleman jockey was as excited over the signal for the "Grand Military." In two minutes, Maxwell, Gordon, the Sergeant, and Iron Heart were rapidly deciding on a plan.

"*Didn't I tell you* they were between *us* and the *Fort?*" groaned wounded Rafferty, the express rider. "For God's sake! Lieutenant; be careful! The Rigiment adores ye! May God go with ye!"

Jack was now speaking sternly to the Sergeant: "You can surely hold on here! You'll have help inside of twelve hours! Maxwell *will* go with me! Can I trust you, Sergeant?"

"To the last cartridge! Save the ladies!" answered the stout old soldier. "I've a *daughter of me own!*" He had tears streaming from his manly eyes.

"Let's see! We are *three!* Give me *three*

more of your best men! One, the lightest man, and best rider you've got! Never mind who! They're *all dead game!*" said Gordon, proudly, for even the "nervous coward" had stood up and fought like a man, as soon as he was used to an Indian yell!

"There's Pete Foley, *the divil's own!* He was bred a race rider on the Curragh!"

"Just the man!" cried Gordon. "Quick now! Iron Heart will lead us out down the cañon! I'll take *two* Indians, and leave you *one*. That gives you four horses. You'll have a troop here before seven o'clock, Sergeant! Trust me?" Jack led his horse down the hill.

"I do!" said the Sergeant, as the men slipped away *one* by *one* down the cañon. "God go with ye, my boy!" said the stout Sergeant, as he wrung Jack's hand. "Ye're a man, every inch of ye!"

Out over the spur of the rolling hills, down on the grassy prairie, riding two and two, (near enough to touch each other,) the eight men rode with Iron Heart, (a dauntless leader,) who directed with his waving hand. The whole party had Winchesters; and Phil's recovered horse was loaded with full canteens, wrapped in spare

saddle-blankets. The men's pouches were filled with cartridges, and a bite of their rations.

The slow trot grew into a lope as five miles passed by. Foley was lightly riding the Lieutenant's blood horse, and a knife and pistol alone hung on his belt. Gordon was mounted on a troop horse, and Foley's Winchester was poised across Iron Heart's saddle. "It may come in handy," said merry Pete, ready to die "for the ladies!" Neither Gordon nor Maxwell spoke till Iron Heart threw up his hand!—He had his own directions from Gordon.

"Here! Foley!" called Jack, softly, "we're *now* within a hundred yards of the Y road leading towards the Fort! The dug-out is a mile down! Iron Heart will give you 'Red Bead' to take you in!" Gordon's teeth were chattering, as he marked the direction of the Fort, and showed Foley a bright star hanging over it, in the tranquil skies of night! There lay help and brave men ready to die for the gentle women!

"Remember! you've got two *white women* to save from shame and torture! Give Norfolk a light rein! Move him steady! And if you're jumped, then *ride like hell!* Send a troop and a surgeon to Diamond Spring, straight, and one to the dug-out, if you ever live to see the post!"

"I'll do it, *dead or alive!*" said the rollicking Irishman, with an iron grip of the Lieutenant's hand. He vanished, bearing Gordon's salvation under his bridle hand. The Indian glided away.

They were swallowed up in darkness! Gordon waited, with beating heart, ten minutes. *"Now!* Men!" he said, "for a straight run in!" Gordon clasped Maxwell's hand. "Vinton! old boy!" he said, "you may have to take the command out of this! You *rank* Ashford! He's a good boy! Trust to Iron Heart, if anything happens *to me!* Let's find that 'dug-out' as quick as we can!"

"Now! All together! Steady!" And the little squad rushed forward, Iron Heart, spectral in the crepuscular light, waving them on with ghostly arm. Twenty minutes later, under a chorus of yells from the outlying Sioux, the party jumped off their horses, behind the ambulance overturned before the door of the dug-out. The Winchesters spoke out in the night, and one by one the arrivals crawled into the narrow opening, as each man shot his own horse before the door. Pushed in, the bundle of canteens was the only charge, for the rescue party carried all else on their persons.

In the gloom, Gordon almost shrieked: "Who's here?"

"Six men! two wounded, an' the ladies!"

cried a hearty voice. "They've got *two* of us outside!"

"And Ashford?" Gordon called out. "Lies beside ye,—under yer foot,—dead and cold, the gallant boy!" With a match in hand, Gordon saw the two women lying fainting on the floor of the underground hovel, beside the stiffening body of the brave lad who died for them, fighting off a hideous foe. In a few words the officers roused the women, who thought the *"last rush"* had come. A draught of priceless water revived them, while crouched side by side in the noisome hovel, half cave, half bank, they all waited silently for the dawn. "Would help never come?" The women sank in silent despair.

Half an hour before day, the ringing sound of the Indian rifles broke once more on the stillness of the early hours! Maxwell, Iron Heart, and Gordon had been grimly watching, while the tired men slept. The two frightened women grasped their new protectors wildly on waking, at this new attack. Was it Death?

Gordon and his men, with the wagon cushions and all available obstructions, as well as earth scooped up with knife and tin cup, had barricaded the low entrance of this semi-underground retreat; devised by the old buffalo hunters. It was not

over ten by fifteen feet in plan, and the low roof hindered stately Gordon from walking easily.

"See here! Maxwell!" said Gordon in a whisper, "don't let the men fire unless the Indians make a rush! It's only throwing away cartridges. We will need every one!" In a corner, Iron Heart and the cavalryman talked in whispers. While the women slept, they could hear feet tramping around over head. The Sioux were madly determined to get them out. Gordon was puzzled.

"Do they mean to *dig* us out?" asked Jack, for he well knew that a few hours must bring help. "They will make their last effort as soon as it's light."

"God knows!" muttered Maxwell. "You know more of Indians than I do! *Ask Iron Heart!*"

"No can dig 'em out! S'pose no *frighten out,* bimeby try *burn* 'em out!"

A horrible thought flashed over Gordon's brain. They might all be *smothered* like dogs! The prairie grass was now dry enough to burn! The desperate men, crouching at the old loopholes stuffed with balls of mud in rags torn from their clothes, held back their fire.

"They are not hurting us now!" Gordon cheerily said. "Don't shoot till it's light enough to *kill.* We'll have help soon, men!" called out

Jack, as he stumbled over the bodies on the floor. Even they were laid aside to be piled into the narrow archway, *at the last!*

"Maxwell!" whispered Jack, "if we had the *ambulance* out of the way, we could pick them off easier! By Heaven! It's only a cover to *them* now! How many Indians are there?"

"About forty," said a sturdy trooper, "less what we've killed. I think we fixed *a dozen!*"

"We haven't men enough to charge them! We *could* make a break, if we didn't *have the women!*" Gordon sadly cried. The morning salute died away; but any attempt to look through a loophole, brought a rain of bullets. Faint streaks of light slowly glimmered in through one or two crevices.

"We'll soon know all!" Gordon bitterly said; "they will do their very worst *now!*" He gave his last directions to the loyal men, and to Iron Heart. "See here! Maxwell!" said he, "stay by the two women to the last! We may have to make a dash and roll that ambulance to one side! I'll take half the men, and you man the loopholes with the others! Why *don't* the help come? Is Foley dead?"

In five minutes, Iron Heart grasped Gordon's hand; "Injin roll up hay, burn 'em out!" It was

true! Dense, stifling smoke drifted against the front walls of the shelter!

Gordon sprang to the two gentle women, crouching on the mud floor in the dark. "Marguerite!" he called softly, as she unclasped her arms from half-fainting Rose Durnsford,—her *new sister* Rose! "Take *this!* Be careful, *now!* You know how to handle it!" He guided her chilled fingers, in the dark. "I'm going to charge these devils! *This* is for *you* and *Rose* at the *very last!* Only *at the last!*"

He placed a short double-barrelled Remington pistol in her hand. "Death is better than to be taken by the Sioux! But only, when the *last man* is down!"

Marguerite Calhoun, in answer, wound her arms around his neck, and whispered in burning accents: "Kiss me *before you go!* My own brave darling! I love you, Gordon, *in life, and death!*" Their lips met in silence!

Gordon, loosening his hunting knife and heavy revolver, sprang to the tunnelled entrance. Maxwell pushed him aside. Gordon turned like a lion at bay! "See here, Vinton!" Gordon hissed, "*you* rank me in your *own corps,* but *I* am the only commander here! Stay by those two women! You'll have *enough to do!*"

"Come on! Iron Heart! Now, quick, boys!" said Gordon. "The Chief will take the *left!* I take the *right!* Follow us with a run! While we rush them back, Maxwell's men will roll that cursed ambulance away! We can then get a clear fire! They've piled this burning hay behind it, and all over it! Shoot low and quick! Push them back! It's our *last* chance! You've got two *white* women to save from a living Hell!"

"All right, Gordon!" cried the maddened troopers; for rank is forgotten when Death stares the soldier in the face! Jack, and the lithe young Pawnee, pulled down the barrier at the door.

There was a rush; a chorus of yells! The crash of ringing shots and wild howls, told of the mad struggle! The loopholes flamed with the incessant discharges of the Winchesters, as the Indians rushed in, to save their burning hay bundles, piled against the wagon! Of the *eight* men who dashed out, only *four* were on their feet, when Sergeant Gavan O'Brien, with the herd guard of twenty men dashed up, and yelled:

"The Seventh forever! Bring the ladies out!"

For in the early dawn, a dozen dead Sioux lay on the grass! A half-score of wounded strove to fire the last shot, as they sprawled in agony.

Gavan O'Brien's twenty men followed wounded reeling Pete Foley back to the dug-out. His Pawnee companion was lying far away, stiff and cold in the long sedge grass of the prairie! His scalp was swinging at the belt of a Sioux warrior, now dashing madly west, in the gullies!—It was the marauders' race for life *now!*

The defeat was complete. "Shoot all these squirming devils! Kill the *last one,* boys!" yelled O'Brien, as wild-eyed Pete Foley rode Gordon's game blood horse up to the doorway of the dug-out. Foley fell off, saying, *"I've kept my word! Are the ladies safe?"*

"Ah! Lift him aisy, for *Christ's sake!"* said the Sergeant, as the men raised Jack Gordon! Foley was surrounded, and cheered, as the gallant Kentucky horse dropped its tired head. He snuffed at his master, lying silent on the grass! There was a flowing tide of red blood creeping out under Jack Gordon's "Custer" neck-tie; and firmly clasped around him, twined the bronze arms of Iron Heart, the dying Pawnee Chief, who had dragged him out of the struggle, and given his own life up for "Jack of the Long Knife!"

The rescued women stood once more in the sunlight. The green prairie sea smiled in peace, rolling far before them!—Gordon's head was rest-

ing now on a rough-made pillow,—his silent face looked very cold and stern in the light of the growing day. Kneeling by his side, Marguerite Calhoun gazed on his closed eyelids. There was only a flicker of the pulse. Her tears fell on the soldier's bronzed cheek. She stooped and kissed the pale face before them all!

The young Pawnee Chief gasped, and motioned with his feeble hand. Maxwell, (with his right arm hanging helplessly by his side,) reeled towards Gordon and his dying dark-skinned friend.

"He dragged the Lieutenant back, and killed two Sioux that were piled up on him. Sure, he's a rare Injin!" said a pitying trooper,—gazing on Iron Heart,—whose eyes were now fast glazing!—The Chief motioned them to bring Marguerite. She gazed around distractedly.

"Speak to him, miss!" the stern-faced Sergeant said, leaning on his still smoking carbine. "He saved *Gordon's* life, and *gave away his own!*" Far away over the prairie came the rattle of carbines, and the pattering hoofs were a sweet chorus as "K" troop swept up, revolvers in hand!

"Safe at last!" The women were on their knees. The sweet Maryland girl bent over the dying Chief. "Great warrior! Big brave! *You* tell him Iron Heart *never forget!*"—and the

dauntless Pawnee's spirit fled! The young Chief's head fell back! Far beyond the dark river, to that mystic "Happy Hunting Ground," the gallant soul took its last flight, beyond the stars. Firmly clasped in his *left* hand, was the revolver Jack Gordon had given this dark Jonathan of his prairie rides!

As "K" troop dashed up, with a ringing cheer, Stanwix, the grizzled bearded Captain, sprang from his horse. He quickly called out: "The men at Diamond Spring are safe now! There's a whole troop there! Ashford?" The Sergeant pointed to a cold and stiff form, covered with a soldier's cloak. The brave boy had *not died in vain!* Stanwix was dazed!

"And Jack Gordon?" the Captain cried. Maxwell answered, as the circle broke away. He pointed to the lady and her charge!—Stanwix dropped his head, and burst into tears.

"*Jack!* My God! *Speak to me!*" Gordon's head was resting low on the throbbing bosom of the woman who owed her life to him!

Before the sun sank in the crimsoned west, the sad cavalcade re-entered Fort McPherson. There was neither "Lack of woman's nursing, nor dearth of woman's tears!"

Ere the "Diamond Spring" detachment was

drawn in, with its honored dead, as the wearied escort wound up the hill, armed to the teeth, in stern defiance of the now flying red men, Maxwell, (pale and exhausted,) had surrendered to the "English Rose," whose loving and grateful words recalled him to a blessed *present,* and a promise of a golden *future!*

Jack Gordon, (weak, and with a drooping eye,) gazed tenderly upon the delicate woman, whose fond eyes followed now his very breath. "Marguerite! I will tell *you alone*, some day, the story of a wrecked life. If you *then* will join your fate with mine, I will try and be worthy of you!" Her eyes told him what her trembling lips could not.

And so, on the borders of the Shadow Land, the Fates relit the extinguished embers of love! For Venus was no longer either the Morning or Evening Star of Jack Gordon's life! The lost Pleiad was now doubly a "Masked Venus."

Two grateful women wrote loving words, seen dimly through falling tears, to Lieutenant Ashford's mother and sister. They told of the martial obsequies of the gallant youth who died for them, gasping, "*Hold out! boys!* Help will surely *come soon!*" Cold and poor the written phrases seemed, but even in their dark days of mourning, these

fond women's hearts were touched with sad pride by the devotion of those who would look on his dear and boyish face "no more!"

"Dead under the flag!" The soldier's last honor!

Before the brave detachment which rescued the imprisoned ladies, (as a "firing party,") gave three volleys over the soldier dead, (their *white* comrades of the fighting line,) Marguerite Calhoun, passing, (with reverent brow,) the open graves of the soldiers, paused at the trench where Iron Heart reposed; his bright eye darkened forever, his friend Red Bead by his side! The grim Pawnees looked on in wonder, as the pale-faced beauty from the "Maryland shore" dropped a delicate white handkerchief in the young Chief's grave! It was wet with blinding tears!

"Give *him a volley!* men!" cried Captain Stanwix! "He died in 'Ours'! Fighting on the Line!"

BOOK III.

ONE WOMAN'S WORK.

CHAPTER XII.

AT CROSS PURPOSES! THE DEMIDOFF PALACE! A GRAND DUKE'S FOLLY! THE MODERN MARIO! THOSE DIAMONDS! EXPELLED FROM RUSSIA! A WRECKED DIPLOMAT!

An August sun glared down on the bare parade ground at Fort McPherson! The listless sentinels turned wearily on the dry path, trodden a thousand thousand times by their dejected predecessors. The post was now weakened by the departure of all the available cavalry force, who were vigorously pushing the southern Indians, *farther* west and south. The mass of the infantry were aiding a movement to drive the Sioux *north and west,* to the confines of the Black Hills. Already the magic word "Gold!" was whispered. The Northern Pacific road was crawling slowly westward.

In distant marts of money, and at Washington, powerful speculators, great land-grabbers, and

scheming would-be millionaires, were plotting to despoil the Sioux of their mystic home in the Black Hills. But even now, grim "Crazy Horse" and stubborn "Sitting Bull" were knitting up the disaffected, to guard the last great triangle of territory left to their bold warriors! Another broken treaty! Another national shame! And an ominous war cloud grew, slowly gathering in the Northwest.

Old General Everett fretted on his veranda, as with a pair of field-glasses he swept the far rolling green-billowed Platte valley.

"I shall have to wait till October for my leave! I must linger here to watch only a few convalescents, a depot of stores, and command two beggarly skeleton companies!" He sighed, as he washed down his usual growl: "The service is going to the dogs!" with a draught of hospital brandy. "Even the ladies are scattered; and all the decent officers out on long scouts! I have hardly a soul even to play a game of chess with! By Jove! I'll write to the Secretary of War!" This the fiery old veteran accomplished, with sundry epistles to Washington friends, as well as missives to his daughters and Marguerite Calhoun, now safely domiciled at Fair Oaks. For these pretty summer birds had fled *eastwardly*,

to await the General's coming; and a few days later, *westwardly,* departed Robert Durnsford and his sweet daughter. Neither Marguerite, nor the "English Rose," could bear to watch the tall, green grass waving over the line of mounds where the men lay, who had died for them!

On the porch of Jack Gordon's quarters, the two friends sat in silence. Maxwell was going *east* on the morrow, to Department Headquarters at Omaha! His arm mended slowly, but he was able now to begin to direct his office operations.

There was a curious constraint between the two men who had faced death together!—Maxwell was glad to leave the post! He would escape, (in travel,) many tantalizing memories! For, in his pride of youth, and conscious of the sudden growth of his affection, he had been content to part with Rose Durnsford, on her promise to await him in the spring, in California.

"My brother will be there then, darling!" she whispered, "and you know what a brother's love is! He will soon be the head of the family! —I only want him to know that I owe my life to you! Father is old, and knows so *little* of America! When Harold speaks for us, our future will be safe! Is it not better to wait?" Even in Maxwell's eager love, he was forced to agree with the

pretty logician. His own modest rank, her brilliant future fortune, the proud insular reserve of the grave Englishman, who could not utter *all* his thanks, in fluent speech, and the necessity of a more formal wooing of the dainty stranger, sealed his lips!

"You have my heart, my soul, my life, Vinton!" she cried, as her head rested on his breast in a stolen adieu!—True, he was happy at heart; for the trains rushing eastward from the "Golden State," (where Rose awaited her brother's arrival on a final yacht cruise from Japan,) were regularly enlisted in Cupid's service as friendly messengers. Her letters were his glimpses of a future fairy Paradise.

Delicate, and tender at heart, he had not spoken even to Jack Gordon; and a similar reserve was observed by the hero of the Diamond Spring fight. A shade of gloom still hung over him. Jack Gordon had not broken his almost sullen silence! With zealous care he avoided the sallies of the merry sisters, Flossie and Maud, who had gaily departed for a summer raid on the helpless eastern beaux.

"I'm tired of *army men!* I shall keep *them* for the future! But civilians now! *Only* civilians!" the saucy young flirt, Flossie, announced. "Mar-

guerite is going to call in every 'eligible' around Fair Oaks, for me to choose from!"

Marguerite Calhoun was hiding unshed tears in her lovely eyes, as she kept back the tell-tale throbbing of her heart, when brave Jack Gordon said "good-bye!" Gordon was forced to regret his hasty promise to tell her of his past; for Phineas Orton's dispatches, arriving later, told him of the conclusion of his Austrian researches. "I must get into Paris to close my business there. I will not write you a partial report, or mere conjecture; and what I have to say, must be told *to you* alone! It must not be trusted to secondary agents, or to written words. I shall come *out* to you, if you cannot come *East* to meet me; for it will take me two or three months yet, to exhaust the subject."

Gordon was thus still linked to his secret past!

The eve of Marguerite's departure, he repressed the burning words which sprang to his lips. "I will keep my oath to the dead! I am not *yet* free!" he bitterly thought. For in the gloom of the night, he fancied he could hear the rustle of the dead woman's robes! His *beautiful*, his *lost,* Irene, seemed to whisper "Wait!" Was it a premonition?

Folding the loving woman to his heart, Gordon said, with broken voice: "I will come to you in the spring! I am entitled then to a leave! But *now,* I cannot go in honor: for I replace a man who is in the field, and the regiment needs every available officer. *Then,* I will come to you! I will *then* tell you all, and you shall give me your answer!"

"You must not wait, my own love! Your answer you shall have *now! I* can wait, but I will love you, only you, to the last moment of the life you gave back to me!" Marguerite answered shyly through tears and smiles.—She could not see him leave her that night, for the loving brown eyes were filled with tears. His strong arms were around her, and with her head on his bosom, she heard the loyal heart beating in his gallant breast, in answer to her own embrace!

Before the scrutiny of the quick-witted army matrons, under the eyes of the audacious Flossie, —and that formidable "veteran observer," General Everett,—Marguerite parted, calmly, with her wounded lover! "Some people *are* strange! I can't make them out!" muttered Miss Flossie, as she settled herself in the luxurious Pullman at North Platte. The old Major's wife, who acted as "dragon" for the party, gazed over her ro-

mantic novel at Marguerite, who was quietly watching the distant buttes of Fort McPherson fade away in the west!

"That girl has absolutely *no* feeling! I doubt if she even said 'Thank you, sir!' to the man who made himself *a Sioux target* to save her ladyship!" (It is needless to say, the critic was in the "sere and yellow" of Life.) But, in that quiet girl's heart, a surging flood of love and gratitude was rising! She dropped her eyes, and murmured in her heart of hearts: "God be with you and keep you, my own one!" as the train rushed eastwardly over the vacant stretches of brown prairie!

While Phineas Orton was, (with much perturbation of mind,) battling with strange tongues, brutal officials, and many inane formalities, (as he disjointedly followed the railway across Austria and Poland, towards St. Petersburg,) he did *not* busy himself with Lieutenant Jack Gordon's immediate enlightenment! "I have to go to Paris, anyway, in a roundabout manner! This little Russian dash, in chase of the 'Masked Venus,'— is on my *own* responsibility. I will come back to Trieste, take a steamer for Marseilles, and after finishing my work at Paris, I will then run over

to London and see this fellow Jenks.—This sudden war is a nuisance!"

For Horace Jenks, "the California plunger," after an acute study of "English still life," in his excursions around the "Babylon of the Nineteenth Century," had strangely blossomed out into a severely correct Briton! "I am safe now from any French prosecution!" he ruminated, "but I guess this is better." Seated in his London hotel, he gazed at a neat visiting card, engraved: "Arthur Maitland," and below the name, the tiny words, "Denver Club." "*Strange,* very *strange,*" ruminated the transformed gambler, "that Baptiste turns up at St. Petersburg as Chef to the French Ambassador!—He *is* a smart devil! I am glad, after all! He is safe there from arrest, or any bother, as a member of the official retinue; and by Jove! *no* man of sense would lose *such a cook!* At any rate, he is out of the way of that mole Orton!—What double game is that dirty Pinkerton spy playing? He must be throwing off this fellow, Brayton, in the interest of Gordon! I suppose he will sell out to the party with the *heaviest pocket!*—But, Gordon must have had some dangerous intrigue to cover up, with that woman. If I had the papers back which that cur Brayton bullied me out of, I would bleed

Lieut. Gordon, and also run that handsome she-devil down! I can't do it now!

"*That* was the time when I was a fool; when I parted with those proofs! Brayton is—God knows where! There's one consolation; Orton knows nothing of *them*, and he does not know friend Baptiste! Josef, (the only other knowing one,) has cleared out, and Orton is probably willing to throw up his hand now and go home! He is blackmailing Gordon, by this time, I suppose! Well," said the disguised Jenks, "I must abjure *'beer and skittles,'* and work to the windward of some of these stately British fellows!

"It's the last time that I will ever part with a paper, or the 'little proofs in the case!'—What a fool! What a fool!—But, at any rate, that Austrian got the dose of cold lead he should have given me!—The boy *I* would like to have tackled, was that popinjay De Brissac! He broke up the neatest sure plant, in Europe!—If I ever *meet him* I'll—" the remainder was prudently drowned in a giraffe tumbler of B and S!

The California card sharper would have mused longer, had he known of the queer chances of Fortune; and the very strangest turns of her rolling wheel!

While he philosophized in London, Phineas

Orton, with an easy change of his passport to "Eneas Morton," was nicely domiciled at the Hôtel de France in St. Petersburg. "That's a good enough designation for these *Russians;* and my name is *not* Phineas Orton, anyway," he ruminated!

Josef, (the Austrian valet,) still eager for *more* of that pleasant sounding gold, was with him. "You will *guarantee* me against any trouble from Demidoff?" he said, as they crossed the Austrian frontier.

"Nonsense!" cried Orton. "I can send *you* over to Sweden at once! Your papers are all right! That's all you need here! Demidoff can't *eat* you! This woman, (if she is here,) is probably making as big a fool of *him,* as she did of the smart Stahrensteins! And the American minister will protect *me!*"

"You are right! She *is* a sly one! So sly!" Josef cried. "But, for heaven's sake, keep *me* away from her! I fear her like a snake!"

The Chicago detective, giving Josef a good hour's work to arrange his belongings in the snug room at the crowded "Petite Moskaja," sauntered out for a preliminary turn around the town!—"I'll be back, *in a couple of hours!*" he said,

carelessly.—"If he *throws out his lines*, I'll know it," Orton ruminated.

"Ah! a peep at the café, and an absinthe, will make me think of dear old Paris once more!" Josef ruffled bravely, in the smoky *salle de bière*, where actors, singers, travellers, commercial men, and all the floating French population played billiards, discussed state news from the Boulevards, and quietly anathematized the icy land of "vodki" and "cabbage soup."

"I *am* a lucky man," cried Josef, as he bade "good-bye" to an old friend, who with furred coat, gold chain, and a sparkling diamond stared contemptuously at the modest debauchees, around him!—Baptiste was in his glory! For he represented the Legation of France, as chief exponent of the gastronomic renown of *La Belle France!*—In a land of culinary savages, he was revered by the hungry hangers-on of the Hotel. They yearned to eat *à la mode!*

When these two scoundrels separated, Baptiste was made aware of all the details of the tragedy at Nice; and Josef guarded in his bosom a new secret of price!

"Now, (to be wise,) I must not let Baptiste know *who* my new master is! *I* am the only safe one!" for the delighted Baptiste had care-

lessly told Josef of all the *secret plots* of Jenks against the fair "Mees Isabel."—"And *I alone* know the *whole* secret now!" Josef then decided rapidly on his course.

When Orton was comfortably disrobed for the night, and every detail of his duty finished, Josef, (with well-affected fear,) requested his master to send him away *to Sweden* as soon as possible!—"I have discovered a secret of such a *dangerous* character, that I cannot tell you all, unless you protect me from every one's vengeance. In fact, I should only tell, *even you,*—in safe Swedish waters!"

"*Nonsense,* Josef," said Orton. "Be *a man!* I'm soon going over to Sweden myself! I'll follow you quickly, and I'll pay you well!"

"Ah! Sir! I have only *one* neck to swing on a rope! You have no right to *take risks for me!* But will you *swear* to send me away, before you begin your operations; and also pay me the price?"

"I will do that, and pay what is right!" Orton said. "This fellow is not lying! He really *is* frightened!"

"Well, Sir! It's five thousand francs! It will save you a month's work; and you cannot speak these languages! Besides, *you* will be safe too!"

Orton laughed.

"Don't be too foolish, Sir!" Josef answered. "People *disappear* here very strangely; and the man who secretly protects *her* now, is *far higher* than Prince Demidoff!" The valet was serious.

Orton rose, and gazed in Josef's eyes. "Is this *true?*" he said sharply.

"Absolutely true," the unflinching valet answered. "And I will show you the man who *knows all!*—I am to see *him* at two o'clock tomorrow! He does not know what *you* want, but for a few hundred francs, he will watch and then tell you all!"

"Go ahead, then!—It's agreed! Go down and get me the steamer sailings! Day after tomorrow, you can surely get off for Hamburg or Sweden! I won't lift a finger till you're gone!"

When Josef returned, Orton was ready for his notes. "I wonder *how high* she flies now! She *is* a 'dazzler!' I must be prudent here," he dropped his voice. He had read Stepniak, and feared that even the rustling of a window curtain, might be fraught with a mystic danger. "I can bluff *Josef,*" he ruminated, "but I do not want to play too high a game *here!* I do not fancy a 'personally conducted' Siberian tour.—I don't like icebergs! I *never* liked wolves!"

Josef, with a twinkling eye, began his recital.

"When Prince Demidoff arrived here,—two days later,—a veiled lady of great elegance was received at his great palace! She has been playing the Empress there, since!—*He* came from Odessa,—(*via* Moscow,) and *the lady* followed in a private car!—My friend has a companion of old, who is the *maître d'hôtel* of this wild millionaire Prince, and *that friend* is a Frenchman, and very naturally curious!—The Demidoff Palace has been wilder in its revels since she came, than even 'Schloss Stahrenstein!'"

"And are there any signs of trouble ahead?" Orton asked. Josef nodded. "*Who* is the great man; and who is *your* friend whom I am to meet?" The detective was really excited.

"Give me the *money* now, and then you'll say I am *right!*" Orton was prepared for his Russian travels and a long sojourn! He laid five one-thousand-franc notes on the table.

"They are yours now, if you have not lied to me."

"My God! I *dare* not! Listen!" said Josef, his voice falling into a whisper. He gazed fearfully around.

"It's the Grand Duke——" the remainder was lost in the ear of the anxious Pinkerton agent, who sprang to his feet.

"Great God! Not the Grand Duke——"

"Hush! For God's sake!" cried Josef. "Be quiet! We are *not* at Campoformio *now!*" Orton pointed to the money. Josef eagerly grasped it. He said softly, "You see *why* I want to leave!"

"You are right! It's a very dangerous quest! And your friend?" Orton rejoined.

"Is that same *Baptiste,* who was the Head Steward of the Cercle des Étrangers at Paris, and is *now* Chef de Cuisine of the French Embassy! His chum is the *maître d'hôtel* of the Prince!"

"Ah!" Orton breathed heavily. "I have my lady *at last!* I think I'll risk a little chat with her," he thought. "But she's too high for Jack Gordon now! Too strong for me to touch her!" He gazed out on the great, red granite column, rising in the square of the Winter Palace, with its four watchful sentinels stalking night and day on duty! . . . Russia! The *Land of Tyranny!*

Josef rapidly ran over the whole story of Baptiste!—"He, (in a menial place,) does not dare to worry her! He might be called to account for the Parisian card swindling; and the life of a *forçat* at Toulon, is *not* agreeable!—Of course, he would lose his place! The Ambassador of France will not have his dependents mix up in any local

mischief. Ah! Baptiste is a wise man! You will get him *cheaply* in this! *Now*, I have told you all! I will show you my gratitude! Send me *safely* away! Go to the Swedish steamer with me! As she moves out, I will give you a letter you can read to *him!* One that tells him you know *all!* And also, that you know *his* past record. For *you* will want me again! Baptiste has plenty of money."

"Josef! You *are* a good fellow! I'll do it!" said Orton. *"A most judicious scoundrel,"* he murmured. "Now! away with you! Let me meet you at two, sharp! Bring him up here! I will ask him about Jenks! *That* will wake him up!" For Orton knew every turn of the Jenks history from Beverly Seaton.

"All right! Sir!" said the happy Josef, who departed gaily. "This wild woman is a gold mine to me!" he cried as he sought his couch.

Phineas Orton pondered over his cigar, as he gazed out on the silent night. The sparkling lamps of night shone on the nonpareil Winter Palace, and its treasure crowded neighbor, "The Hermitage." The deep Neva rushed along to join the Gulf of Finland, tossing on its icy bosom the Czar's magnificent yacht, his gigantic war vessels, and the keels of humble barges of fragrant

birch, hand hewn, and pinned together by the stout peasants, from Lake Ladoga. A thousand lights gleamed from the windows of the Winter Palace and the Hermitage!—A chosen regiment there watched over the slumbers of the old Czar, as yet ignorant of the desperate fiends who would gloat over his imperial blood splashing the side-walk stones of a common street of the capital city. Vengeance first! The gallows later!

The sound of music, laughter, the clinking of wine glasses, the voluptuous refrain of *fin de siècle* ditties, (inimitable in wit, and infamous in suggestion,) all these were borne to Orton's ears! Women's voices, varied from the strident tones of the *déclassée,* to the gentle accents of fair sisters, (not yet betrayed by the gilded vices of the "Northern Paris,") reached him! While the joyous happy throng poured along the crowded avenue, dozens of stolid porters, (rolled in their dirty sheep-skins,) hibernated on the door-steps of the closed shops! Lines of sleepy "isvostchiks" nodded, (sodden with vodki,) on their narrow carriage seats!

"This is a nice place, to get *away from!* I think it is a little *too far North* for me!" Orton mused. "I *might* worry Prince Demidoff a little, but the Grand Duke,—he is 'out of sight'!"

As Orton threw himself on his couch, he

thought of the reckless "Mees Isabel," the companion of an Imperial Grand Duke, stealing out to a dinner, (on the Island,) unfaithful even to her doting Tartar lover. She was laughing now, (over the brimming wine glass,) with her Imperial admirer,—while Demidoff was chafing sourly on "Palace Duty," in some of his multifarious prerogatives as a "Pillar of the Throne of the Romanoffs!"

"I'll get one good look at her! I'll bully the facts out of this modern Soyer, and then verify the picture! Then, I will leave this land of splendid barbarism! I must be sure that Jack Gordon's pet, *is* the *chère amie* of this youthful Romeo! A Grand Duke sighing at her feet! Such is the way of 'light flesh and corrupt blood!' If she does not meet with some tragedy in her mad career, then it's only because 'the devil takes care of his own'!" the Pinkerton man moralized.

"*What* a woman! *What* a history! But how can I tell *Gordon* all this? If he really loved this woman, it will break his heart! Wife; or sister? I pray God, *not!* If she was only a plaything of the past, he may forget,—he may *already* have forgotten. I will get home and find out the whole plot of the story, before I put in *my chapters!* Thank my lucky stars, I have her picture here

now; sent from the Bank. Brayton, I shall fight shy of; he is a little *too* professional!"

The dim yellow sun was only feebly chasing away the clinging mists of the day, as Josef escorted Baptiste to the table of the café, where Orton trifled with a cigar and an expurgated *Galignani.* In half an hour, Baptiste, seated in Orton's room, had divulged his entire social researches. Quick-witted Orton used the lever of his past Parisian life, to pry open the secret chambers of the *chef's* brain.

He knew all now. The Sardanapalian orgies, —the midnight adventures,—the double treason, supplemented by *another* intrigue,—of the wanton-eyed Masked Venus!

"She does not care for the Grand Duke! He is only a lumpy, long-legged boy,—vicious and foolish," so Baptiste remarked.—He had the just scorn of a "high class servant" for the pampered fools he saw around him!

"She is *really* music crazy, and this tenor, this waxen-faced Lothario, Armand, has flattered her, I suppose!—She *may* look forward to going on the stage herself. All the women here rave over him!—I fancy he thinks that the Grand Duke's protégée may be a powerful ally in his schemes.—But it is laughable to think of Demidoff

being lured away, and the Grand Duke, driving by the hour, around the Gardens, on the Island, in wild anxiety, while *she* leans gaily over the piano with Armand, in a *cabinet particulier!*"

"Where's the place?" said Orton.

"At 'Nicolai's,' on the Kammenoi Island, where the gypsies and Guard Officers spend their evenings!" Baptiste answered. "In the afternoon, it's very quiet there. Armand steals away from his rehearsal, and she meets him *there;* when she can dodge the Grand Duke!

"Latour says that she has the Grand Duke excited to a point of maddest folly, with her sly coquetry!—He fees Demidoff's servants, under his very nose!—They are all a lot of spies here; bought and doubly bought! Neither lock nor key, —neither stone walls, nor the darkness of night, can hide anything *here!* These Russians will outlie and outsteal, *even a Greek!*" said Baptiste, puffing his cigarette in contempt!

"Does Latour know when she slips away?" said Orton.

"*Always!*" replied Baptiste!—"She has to trust *some one;* and I think she pays him well! Demidoff would have him flayed with horsewhips, if he found out that Latour handles all the letters,

both for the Grand Duke, and the tenor!" Baptiste laughed. "I am safe, because I *am afraid!*"

Orton answered: "I shall stay here a week or so! I am sending Josef over to Sweden on some of my affairs. Let me know when *she* meets this modern Mario, again! How does the Grand Duke communicate?" Orton asked.

"Oh! He sends his French valet from the Annitchikoff Palace, where he is now staying with the Czarevitch! If the 'Belle Dame' is visible, he delivers the letter! If not, he gives it to Latour; and the *tenor* does the same!" Baptiste answered.

"Then let Latour notify *you,* and you immediately send to *me!* Don't let me be known in this! You shall have your reward, Baptiste! I shall not leave the hotel, save for a few minutes! Let your man wait for me!"

The *chef* grinned and withdrew!

Before the delighted Josef safely descended at Stockholm, Orton was master of all the intrigues centering at the Demidoff palace!—While he waited, on the fourth day, restlessly moping in his self-imposed confinement, the laughing "Mees Isabel" was gazing tenderly at the lovelorn Grand Duke in an upper room at "Nicolai's."

"*These* shall be yours! I offer you my con-

tinual protection, if you will go to the Crimea with me! I have a fairy château there! You will be the Lady of the Domain!" The Venus, (masked no longer,) feasted her eyes on three magnificent caskets of flashing diamonds, spread out on the table!—"I brought them *here*, as *you* can place them in safety! I would not trust them at Demidoff's! You can take them in your carriage, and deposit them! Don't take them to the Imperial Bank," he said, (awkwardly,) "they know *me* there *to well!* I will give you a man, (in plain clothes), to follow your carriage! Be careful!"

The woman was dazzled. It was a royal parure: and the heavy morocco and gold bound boxes bore the Imperial arms! A fortune!

"And Demidoff?" she murmured.

"I will take care of *him!* He would not hesitate to injure *you!* But he fears *me!* I, *alone*, can prevent his revenge!" And the enamoured fool threw his arms around the Delilah, who passed her hand over his burning brow!

"It is true," she quickly thought. "I can get away easier from South Russia; and I must meet Armand later in Europe, when I know this fiend Jenks is baffled for good! *Dare* I appear on the stage and sing? Yes! In the *future!*"

Her excited brain pictured the applause of

the listening throng!—The glamour of vanity lingered around her!—All men should bow before the great Diva,—the Masked Venus no more! "If,—if *Gordon* were only--" she dared not finish! For he had been *true to her!*—"He saved me; and he has forgotten!" Her head drooped. The Grand Duke had his answer!

When the evening shadows fell, the youthful lover whispered: "I *must* go to a palace dinner! I could not account for my absence! One week from to-day, meet me here!—Have all in readiness! I will have my intendant bring all your luggage!—Latour will give it to him! I shall get my orders for the Crimea, *to-night,* probably! From *here,* if you bring your little *sac de voyage,* we will go to the station! You will have a car on the special train! And *you* will be *safe* at our future home on the Black Sea, before that fool, Demidoff, knows you have left the city! All your luggage will be on our train! Latour will give my trusted man all! Demidoff never glances at a detail! He is a *grand seigneur!*" Her pleading lover breathlessly awaited her promise.

"Mees Isabel," the wondrously beautiful waif, hesitated! "Another step on Life's downward stairway!" Yet, it flashed over her mind, that if she waited in the capital, a discovery of her

treason, might cost her the friendship of *both* her dupes!

"But Armand? The impassioned Mario! Her musical future?"

"I save at least *one* protector here! My musical future is safe also, if there is no scandal! I might not otherwise be able to get *out* of Russia! This is the stronger man in power!—and these royal diamonds!" She extended her hand, with the smile of a Sultana: "I *will* go with you! I will confide in your *honor!*"

Ten minutes later, Irene, lost Irene, drove over the Nicolayefsky Bridge. A hundred yards behind her carriage, a coupé loitered along. In the middle of the seven superb granite arches, (over which thousands of heart-broken prisoners have been dragged to the dark bastions of the Fortress), "Mees Isabel" stopped the carriage. "I will walk a little, and breathe the fresh air!" she said.

Her lightning glance had caught the tall spires of the Imperial Mausoleum! "Those coats of arms on the jewel boxes! Where *did* he get these diamonds?—I must not risk a visit *there!*" She shivered slightly, and wrapping her rich cloak around her, leaned on one of the circular parapets of the central arch!—Splash!—a heavy object fell

in the darkened waters!—*Another! Another!* Irene gazed furtively around!—"Those boxes are heavy enough to sink at once!—thanks to their gold-bronze mountings!

"*Now!* I am safe!" She regained her carriage. "I will pack these gems in a sealed case! They shall be in Bleichröder's Bank at Berlin in three days! They are a queen's ransom! Then I am beyond detection! For he gave them to me *alone!* He would not *dare* to reveal the secret! Where did he get them? They *are* royal!"

Hastily concealing the priceless jewels on her arrival, "Mees Isabel" descended to meet, with her provoking smiles, the fiery glances of her lover Demidoff.

A long night of uneasy dreams was over at last.—Discreetly robed in black, the intending fugitive walked forth, alone, unattended!—Her Tartar lover, after a battle night at the Yacht Club, was dreaming of the wild games, where thousands of roubles changed hands, without a murmur!

"I was wise to make Berlin my only place of deposit!—Bleichröder is safe beyond doubt; and their German caution is proverbial!" "Mees Isabel" muttered. In half an hour, she left the agency. "I can *always* reach Berlin; it is safer

for me than France, England, or Italy; and, should I be pursued, I can close affairs with them from any respectable Bank, in the travelled world!—How fortunate!" She strode along, a radiant goddess; for the manager said: "Our head clerk goes to Berlin to-day, at noon, on confidential business, (about the new loan,)"—he lowered his voice!—"In two days, you shall have a return dispatch here! Will you call?" The Diva assented, for she had already the package receipt in her pocket!—She had taken the precaution to *walk*.

Joyously *driving at random*, around for an hour, she resolutely re-entered the granite-walled harem of Demidoff!—"I am armed against Fate, now! But I *must* see Armand! He must not know *all!* But he shall know that I will join him! He, too, is excitable and fantastic! I will see him at 'Nicolai's' the day before! *Then*, there can be no *esclandre!*"

Jealously watching all, from her witching eyes, Irene found, as the fatal day approached, that Latour was doubly deferential. He had his *secret orders* from the Grand Duke!

"I cannot dare to even write Demidoff," she thought. "The Grand Duke will choose his own way to break the news! Just as well! *Qui s'ex-*

cuse, s'accuse!" said she, with a mocking laugh. "I will keep out of trouble!" The morrow was to witness her quasi-imperial departure; when Latour deferentially said, (choosing a few moments of safety,) "If Madame's luggage is all arranged *this* afternoon, it will be ready for instant removal!"

"Better so!" said the beauty, who knew that he now represented her imperially-born lover.

As she disappeared, gliding along with the air of a Duchess *de la vieille roche,* Latour decided, "I must notify Baptiste *at once!*—If his friend watches her *this afternoon*, he will surely find her saying 'adieu' to the peerless Armand!"

Latour chuckled as he dispatched his letter to notify the eager spy. When in the gray gleam of the afternoon, the Masked Venus, heavily veiled, descended from her coupé at "Nicolai's," it was with a beating heart she passed swiftly upstairs to the luxurious rooms, retained for her, by the orders of the enamoured young "offshoot of the Romanoffs!"

"Ah! Pardon!" said a gentleman, who obstructed her way!—It was the keen-eyed Orton. Gracefully nodding, the veiled goddess fled away! "That *is* the woman, one in a thousand! But, to see her face! To hear her voice! I will wait till

she is at ease! So the tenor and the Duke, are rivals! Almost an operatic scene!" Orton's lip curled, as he thought of the meanness of the adventure.

The services of Baptiste had placed Orton *en rapport* with the head steward of the superb resort!—Slipping in quietly, for a glass of absinthe, Orton whispered to that functionary arrayed in *habit de soir* and white tie, "Five hundred roubles for a safe peep into that room! I *must see* her!"

"And you swear you will not *interfere?*" said the steward, with a smile. He indicated Armand, darting up stairs in all the glory of sables and silk mufflers!

"Oh! It's nothing to me! I don't care!" Orton said.

"Quick! Then follow me! There is a *trou de loup* used by the *secret police,*" he said, with a faint smile. The detective's heart beat wildly. *At last!* he would verify his theory! Every feature of the picture in his pocket was pictured in his mind.

"I'll come and let you out in half an hour! They must go *first!* They won't be long! I would not dare to risk your meeting them." And the steward glided down the back stairs.

Orton was only desirous to gaze once more on the face of the woman he had sought over land and sea. The backs of the excited couple were toward him!—They were talking earnestly at the window. The fair unknown took off her hat and veil. A silver chandelier was on the table. A servant entering, lit the wax candles in the branched candelabra. While he deftly arranged the wine and decanters, the woman's face was turned away! The very moment that the noiseless servitor left, the woman turned in the full light, as Armand locked the door!

"It *is* Irene Hope! The she-devil who killed Neill! Only her hair is now golden!—I see it; she had disguised herself, and watched her chance at St. Louis! This woman waited to strike the blow! Why? Alas! I have no evidence against her! I am powerless!"

Orton's brain was filled with every quick, darting thought suggested by his past theories!

"Yes! The woman of the picture! Irene Hope! Isabel Percy! Mees Isabel!" he fumed in helplessness. The lovers billed and cooed!

He stilled the quick beating of his heart! "I have seen all I wish!" He drew away, with an air of disgust, as the two lovers were passionately pleading with each other! The closet door opened

softly, and the steward glided quickly in, locking the anteroom on the inside. Orton sprang to his feet! The steward's hand was pressed over his mouth! He whispered: "Hush! for God's sake, or we are lost! The *Grand Duke* is coming *up stairs* in a mad transport! *She* has been betrayed, or some devilish accident has happened! *Look*, and *be quiet!* We must *hide here!* It is our only chance!"

A sound of armed heels resounded on the stair! The door quivered under a vigorous onslaught. Orton had only time to see—through his secret-service peep-hole—the alarmed Armand spring ferociously forward when the crash of a bursted door, and the struggles of two infuriated men straining in a deadly embrace, filled the corridor with noisy clamor!

"They will *kill* each other!" hoarsely whispered Orton, for the Grand Duke was trying to draw his revolver! He was in undress cavalry uniform, but still belted and armed! Armand, clinging to the feeble youth, strove to drag him to the table, where a glittering game knife was within reach! The wretched Sultana lay sobbing helplessly in a huge chair!

In an instant a half-dozen plainly dressed men sprang into the room! The victorious tenor

was dragged back! The Grand Duke was livid, as he faced a stern, soldierly man, who cried: "Shoot that French fool if he lifts a hand! He has assaulted the *Grand Duke!*"

Uncovering, the official said: "Your Highness! Please to recognize this!" showing him a paper. The princely youth bowed. "The orders of the Czar!" said the leading intruder!

"What is this outrage?" screamed the youth. He spoke in French, for the minor police evidently were Russians of the common order. The General sternly said, cap in hand:

"Your Highness! you are under arrest until you explain the absence of certain family diamonds! I counsel *silence!* I deeply regret this fracas, for *your* sake!"

General Ostrokoff cried, turning on his heel: "All out but *you!*" He pointed to the men holding the trembling tenor! "Close the door! Search that woman's body!" He held in his hand a drawn pistol! While the bruised and bleeding antagonists turned away, Ostrokoff stood and waited in silence! At a sign, he approached the Grand Duke. A few hurried whispers ensued. "Nothing! Sir!" repeated the nimble policeman, whose citizen's dress belied his professional skill!

Ah! Even in her terror, Irene, the unmasked

Venus, rejoiced that the telegram announcing the safe arrival of her "sealed package" had been destroyed! Her name was safe from police scrutiny. The jewels were deposited in her *German appellation;* a secret of her own! The St. Petersburg receipt was far away over the border, sent by a mail now three days gone!

"What *will* they do with me!" She shuddered. "And Demidoff? My God! He will hound me to death!"

In a corner General Ostrokoff and the dishevelled Grand Duke conversed for five minutes. Suddenly Ostrokoff called in an aid. "See that French fool over the border at Wirballen! Don't lose him a moment from your sight! Take a carriage! Let his trumpery goods be all packed! Take an extra man! At the station you will find an engine and one car! Turn the singer loose at the German frontier! I will notify the Director of the Opera! Don't let him speak to a human being! Your *head* will answer for it! I will telegraph *my orders* to the station! You will have passports and money there before you arrive! *Go,* and *report by telegraph!*"

The crestfallen "Mario"—the idol of the easy-minded Petersburg dames—was dragged off like a dog! He never turned his head! He was

glad to leave Holy Russia with life! The frightened woman was sobbing hysterically!

Orton, at his place of espionage, felt the cold beads on his brow. "My God! will they *never* go?" he groaned in spirit.

An attendant officer knocked, and entered. Saluting the Grand Duke, he offered a long cloak, lined with richest sables!—"The carriage of His Highness!" he mechanically reported!—The disgraced young Prince strode across the room. Seizing the woman's hands, he hissed: "*You* are safe! *Canaille!* Your baggage has been searched! Nothing found! Keep *your* mouth shut!" And casting a last contemptuous glance at the entrapped wanton, the Grand Duke descended the stairway.—A fallen star!

A rattle of sabres announced the presence of an "honorary escort," as the wheels of a departing court carriage resounded on the driveway!—The noble giver of the diamond parure, was beginning a long journey *for his health* to the dangerous Caucasus! He well knew that *silence was golden!*

"And *now*, Madame! Be stirring!" said General Ostrokoff, as he signed to a waiting officer; who handed the frightened woman her scattered belongings! "Quick! One *noble name*

saves that snowy neck of yours! You will have a quick trip to Cracow, and if you ever set foot on Russian ground again, *then* your life is forfeit!"

"Away with her! You'll find your baggage on the train! Keep your tongue quiet now, and *in the future,* or the long arm of the Czar may reach you!" He growled the last in her ear!

When the room was deserted Orton slipped down the servants' staircase! The midnight train carried out of St. Petersburg, that night, a man glad to count the moments till he saw in blissful transport, a Prussian uniform! "I do not think Russia agrees with my health," the detective mused.

As he descended at Berlin, Phineas Orton wondered where "Mees Isabel" was hiding. She was in Cracow, preparing to flee to Venice, for she now feared even Austrian ground. "The priceless diamonds are safe!" was her gleeful reflection; as at the same time in Berlin, Orton read of the mysterious disappearance of *imperial family jewels* of great value, and the public disgrace of a young Grand Duke.

"This is an astounding crime," mused the detective. "How did she secure her plunder? Had she confederates? I cannot see who con-

veyed away these diamonds for her! Was it Demidoff, anxious to ruin his rival? No! He has *too much to lose!* This American she-devil has outwitted them all! They dare not *openly* seize her person!—Thank God! She will not return to our shores! I fancy she will go far! The Czar's arm is long! It may strike in a bitter vengeance! I hardly think I shall see that face again!"

CHAPTER XIII.

A MODERN BIANCA CAPELLO! BELEAGUERED PARIS! BORDER HAPPENINGS! THE WRECKED DIPLOMAT! LORD ALFRED BEAUFORT'S YACHT! THE GRAND OPERA AT CAIRO! ARMAND'S FAITH! CHERIF PASHA'S SOIRÉE! EXIT JENKS. THE HOURI'S HEGIRA!

THE summer sun danced gaily on the Grand Canal of Venice, as a lovely woman sat idly gazing on the shimmering waters of the swelling green flood below her. There, on that silky, elastic, verdant pavement, the reflections of the silent and storied mansions broke in a maze of changing wonder pictures. Her languid eye rested on antique palaces, from whose richly decorated balconies, laughing Bianca Capello, and the beautiful, wicked Lucrezia Borgia, had showered down roses in the white moonlight, on the up-turned faces of their lovers, lingering below under the witchery of their bright eyes! The echoes of those passionate voices were long, long ago stilled in death!

Gone were the days of the cavalier and his lute,—the poisoned dagger, and the insidious bowl; yet no fairer face ever beamed from a Venetian casement than this, as the stranger watched the emerald tide creep slowly along beneath her!

"Shadows! I am weary of *shadows!*" the beauty coldly murmured. She shivered and entered a room where a Doge's haughty daughter once held her court! She threw herself on a divan, heaped with the spoils of the East! "I must *think!* I must leave this place, haunted with its dead Past! Whither? Paris is in the grasp of those human fiends, the Communists! Berlin is *too near* Russia! There is a Muscovite secret-service bureau there!"

For *even now,* in the summer of Germany's great victory, *la belle inconnue,* Mees Isabel, feared always the resentment of the unpitying Demidoff, and the revenge of the Imperial family, whose degenerate member had broken the laws of honor for *her* sake! "I dare not go to *England!* Only Italy and the East are open to me! If I only knew of the movements of Beverly! I am afraid to remain in Austria! The Stahrensteins have not yet forgotten! The clan is powerful! This mad whirl of Communism has broken

up all the art life of Paris! I know not even where my Armand has been driven by fate; and *would* he see me now? Would *he care* to meet me?"

Flaming Paris was dying now in ashes and cinders; for it was the summer of 1871.

"If I did not fear that watchful fiend, Jenks, I might hide safely in England! But *he* too will never forgive that awful night at Nice!" Irene, the waif, strode across the room! "If it were in the *old days!* But no! There is not a single hand to strike a blow for me now! If *he* were only out of the way! But I have not a friend in the world!" Irene Gordon, (even in her luxurious loveliness,) spurred on by fear, and casting her past far away from her, was slowly learning that the easy downward path grew more dangerous every day!

"Money! Yes! Thanks to my money, I can hide!" She thought of her hidden store at Bleichröder's. "And that is all! No! The *diamonds!* I have them *safe, safe!*" She smiled grimly! The glittering wages of sin were still hers!—"If I could but find my Armand! We could go then to strange lands! My wealth would keep *him;* and I might yet be a *great singer!*" She bowed her head in her hands.

Before her rose the pale, relentless face of her brother Beverly, heart-hungry and desperate; and at her side, the merciless gambler who sought her final ruin! Jack Gordon was a mere forgotten shade!

"I will go mad, if I stay here alone," she muttered. Ringing for her maid, she robed herself and went, piloted by a couple of modern gondoliers, to the Opera House on the Piazza San Marco. "They will surely know where Armand is now! I will get a *loge* for to-night! The music may chase away this unrest, *this mad worry,* from my brain!"

Two hours later, returning from a mimic sea voyage drifting over the lagoon, the world's waif had a new light in her eyes!—Hope's illusive star glittered once more before her deeply shadowed eyes!

"Armand will be in Cairo!—To open the Grand Opera, and with Verdi as Director!—I *must* go there! It is wonderful! For under the crescent, the enemy of Russia is safe! Ah! Three weary months must elapse, before the Khedive's great Temple of Music on the Esbekieyeh will give to the world the long waited-for 'Aïda,'—in his new fairy city, on the dreamy Nile.—But this is surely a safe haven of refuge! I can take a

steamer to Brindisi, and stepping from one boat to the other, leave quietly: I will wait! I must meet Armand there!"

Dusky, fleecy robes, and an impenetrable veil, could not fully hide the royal beauty of the shrouded Venus, who sat alone;—her troubled soul thrilling to the mimic woes of the perennial "lover and his lady" of the stage! As the blended passion and pleading rose on the perfumed air, the veiled Venus bitterly thought of her own wrecked life!

"These scenes, *too,* are mere *shadow pictures!* The real heartbreak is all around us! It is the vampire of daily life!" She dared not look back at her far-away innocent girlhood; her "times of teen." The far, dim stretches of the rich valley of the Shenandoah were veiled from her sight by blinding tears!—As the music of the matchless quartette in "Rigoletto" rang out, she gazed upon the painted pageantry of woe!—"The only hell there *is to meet,* is burning *here,* here in *my heart!*" she faltered, as the tenor's silver voice swelled out and blended with the mocking notes of the "plaything of an hour." Cast off,—in sombre robes, the *once* loved, and *now* betrayed, the "lost one" was wailing alone "out in the storm!" Such was the play!

A mental picture showed Irene the rose-shaded porch of Seaton Hall, and her father, silver haired, bidding a last adieu to the bright-browed lad, going forth to battle for "Dixie's Land!"—The trees shading her mother's grave trembled before her dimmed eyes once more! With a storm of passionate regret she felt that she would never dare to drop a blossom on that sacred mound!

"I *must* go away! Away from *myself!* Out! out again into *my* world!—the world of self-made sorrow,—of fruitless sin,—of vain regret! A *dark* world, where a past I fear to think of leads me on to a *future* I dare not face!"—Signing imperiously to her wondering maid, Irene touched the latch of the *loge!*

She started back. At the threshold before her, in all the bravery of star and order, (*chapeau* in hand,) stood Baron Rohrenberg, the quondam Swedish Ambassador at Vienna; Max Stahrenstein's friend and guest was he in those days when the nightingales lulled the Masked Venus to sleep at Fürstenfeld!

"It needs not the *face,* most lovely one! I would know you at the world's end! You are going? Permit me!" and the Ambassador offered his arm in the manner of *la vieille cour!*

The blood surged back to Irene's heart. Over her lovely face a new light shone. A wicked smile lingered on "the shameful, scornful lips that graced their shame!"—"And you are *en voyage,* Baron?" she said, with the flute-like voice, ranging over its melodies of old.

"Ah! No! I am now accredited at Florence, and soon shall go to Rome! We are now in *free Italy. You* are the only lovely captive, from sea to sea!—The queen, (beauty-crowned,) of the foamy Adriatic!"

A vicious light was shining in Irene's eyes as she swept down the corridor. "An Ambassador, —in power! I can *use* this vain fool! I *remember* his feeble gallantries! He shall find out from America, what I wish; and then, *Egypt and Armand.*"

There was no memory of another lover lingering with her, as the gondola swept silently along! A new dupe was kneeling at her feet!

Cynic, wit, voluptuary, and miser, Rohrenberg was a relic of the days when ambassadors *dined* "as a profession," and made *classic love* to idle palace dames!—A scholar, an epicure, a critic, he was, at heart, only an accomplished scoundrel, in embroidered garb, spangled with easily won decorations!—Drifting rapidly past the shores on

the River of Life, he still grasped, with trembling hand, at the myrtle trailing in its flowing stream! Pleasure his god! Gold his idol!

Out on the moonlit lagoon, after the soft dalliance of a *petit souper*, Rohrenberg, listening to the strains of the band floating on the hushed night from the Piazza San Marco, murmured, "Let *me* be your slave! Let *me* alone be your protector!" *Vanitas vanitatum!*

The splendid-eyed woman trailed her hand over the rail, and scattered flashing diamond drops on his brow, as he lay reclining on the cushions. "I *thus* devote you to my service!" she laughed. "Be my true knight!"

"You are the fairy goddess of the Lake!" cried the Ambassador in florid compliment.

At the gates of beleaguered Paris, Phineas Orton waited eagerly for the columns of Mac Mahon in the wearying days of May, 1871!—"I might as well have buried myself in a Russian prison, as among *these madmen!*"—the "Pinkerton man" meditated.—"I am now checkmated, and I have thrown my time away *like a fool!*" For, while the soldiers of the unlucky Maréchal gathered for his last dismal victory, (won by mere force of numbers,) over his frenzied fellow-citizens, —Orton reflected that he had lost the woman,—

(the fleeting shadow he chased,—) and that he was powerless even to harm her in the future! —"And, by Heavens, these rolling flames, sweeping over the town, will blot out the last proof of the villany which has, *so far,* hoodwinked Gordon!" Orton, with a badge of the "American Ambulance" on his arm, was, at least, *safe!*— "If they free this city, I will hie back to my own land! But if I tell this strange story to Gordon, will he have faith? I fear not! What had he to cover up? And this queer fellow, Alfred Brayton, can I reach *him* now?"

After the infuriated Versaillese had fought their way, at the bayonet point, up the Rue de Rivoli, after the last rattling platoon volley had died away, and the blood of the slaughtered Communists had been washed from the steps of the Madeleine Church, Orton wandered out with a friendly *gendarme,* to find only smoking piles of ashes covering the square, where the "commission" received from Campoformio had been incinerated, with other relics of poor mortality! "I am simply checkmated by Fate!" Orton cried.

"That's done now,—*another failure!* What can I *write?* What shall I *say?* I must make up my mind on the steamer!" In the first trains

out of Paris, (still lit up with the red glow of the great conflagration,) Orton, armed with an American pass, gladly fled away!—He only breathed freely, when the storms of the wind-swept channel tossed the prow of the stout Calais boat high in air!

"Good-bye, *La Belle France!* Good-bye, *Mees Isabel,*—the *Masked Venus*! I am done with this quest!" he ejaculated, as he whistled "Home, Sweet Home!" "I have made an ass of myself!"

Tarrying a day in London, he found that Horace Jenks, (alias and all,) had departed for Cairo; where the flood-tide wealth of the lavish Khedive, Ismail Pasha, was running a golden stream, in the very streets!

"Just as well! Jenks knows nothing later! He has not left London!" When the fleet Cunarder left the last glimpse of the rocky Irish shore behind, Orton vainly tried to gain a newer wisdom, in his tiger-like trampings of the deck! "By Jove! She might *show up again!* Brayton is away! I'll hoodwink *him!* To Gordon I will only tell *half the tale!* Why break his heart? There may be a fortune in this yet; and I can always cover my tracks! Yes! My telegram *was* wise!" He addressed himself to the pleasures of the smoking-room, and wondered if the St. Louis

Bank would answer at New York his cablegram: "Coming. Telegraph me Astor House. Will reply at once!"

On the western frontier, as the summer faded into autumn, the American soldiers, far afield, struggled bravely with their bronzed native foes! General Everett, (with his sabre, dress coat, cigar box, and *high temper,*) had rolled, (in contumacious growling,) eastwardly to join his family, (in a short paternal *side scene*); and then, (*making himself large,*) under the very shadow of the War Department, at the Metropolitan Club, calmly continued those ingenious fairy tales, "the one thousand and eleven campaigns," beginning: "When we moved out and crossed the Rapidan," etc., etc.

The cocktails, juleps, oysters, reed-birds, and terrapin of the capital, consoled the grumbling veteran for the days, months, and years of "buffalo hump," venison, and stringy "commissary beef."—Struggling toward the punch bowl, with a proud heart, and a red face, the old hero forgot his frontier exile, as he towed along some over-ripe beauty, (dating from the Florida war,) who softly murmured, "How *well* you are looking! My *dear* General!" This was a winter Paradise!

At distant Fort Sanders, in far Nebraska, Vinton Maxwell, the Division Engineer, with thoughtful brow, toiled over the finishing of that series of maps, whose daily growth only recalled the final objective point,—California,—San Francisco,—four months' leave,—and *Rose!* The *English Rose!* The sweet one, waiting him; whose letters, if bound, would rival the voluminous correspondence of those typical lovers, "Abelard and Heloise."—For she, too, was anxiously waiting for *brother Harold!*

Jack Gordon, fretting at Fort McPherson, pored over the daily mail from Marguerite Calhoun, which *balanced* the western English dispatch line of Rose Durnsford!—"Well!" he murmured, (with clouded brow,) "the troops will soon be here! I can turn over all this property, and then I will see what the Lady of Fair Oaks will say to a western visitor!" The hour was coming when his promise, (the shadow of two sad years,) would be no longer binding!—"When Orton returns, I will have a clear record!—I can *then* tell Maxwell all! I can begin a new life! I will say good-bye to the 'Seventh,' and Belvoir will have a living mistress once more!"

As Gordon walked his room, (in unconscious excitement,)—he felt a twinge of the still tender

wound!—Thrusting his hand in his breast pocket, he drew out the picture of lost Irene,—dead Irene,—the poor girl whose last good-bye was faltered at the ominous hour of midnight!—It was an evil omen!

He turned ashen pale, as he laid the picture away, safe from any curious gaze! "She comes still between us, *even now!*" he thought, and when he walked out, at random, his erring footsteps brought him to the lonely grave of Iron Heart, the Pawnee Chief!

. . . , .

"Only a month more till the Grand Opera opens at Cairo!" sighed "Mees Isabel" as she gazed out of the windows of a splendid apartment in the "Hotel de Russie" on the Pincian! Far below her lay old Rome, buried under a three fathom depth of the débris of twenty centuries of war, conflagration, and storm!

Beyond the muddy Tiber, the giant dome of St. Peter's hung, a hovering benediction in the cold winter air, and the Italian flag fluttering freely on Castle San Angelo told of a new order of things. For Adrian's Mole, was a new King's castle! Gentle Pius IX. was now pushed back into the little Leonine city, where his Swiss guards

glared stolidly on the insolent army sentinels, tramping along the boundaries!

In the leafy walks of the Quirinal gardens, beautiful laughing Roman ladies coquetted with the natty, idle Italian officers;—swelling roysterers in their day of *temporary* triumph! These gay *cavalieri,* their mournfully romantic eyes fixed tenderly on the clinging beauties, lit up, with their tinsel, the old gardens, once sacred to austere Cardinals, and the velvet-eyed Monsignori! The place blazed with the unwonted gaiety of blue tunics, silver trappings, and jingling spur and sabre! The reigning *Deus ex machina* was General Cialdini!

Seated on cosy benches, where the Princes of the Church once mused over the glories of haughty Rome, these military Montagues and Capulets amicably strove for the smiles of the too easily won dames, who adored the brilliant military staff! In the old banqueting halls on the Monte Cavallo groups of martial dandies, ferocious in moustache and ready frown, drained their flowing cups from the best vintages of the pillaged sacerdotal cellars!

It was a time of "storm and stress." Delicate and tangled negotiations were dragging along to establish some *modus vivendi* in the Imperial

city, where *Il Re galantuomo* gazed wistfully at the few acres left to the once mighty successor of Peter! This "Naboth's vineyard" was coveted by the grasping Italian statesmen, who urged on the royal soldiers, yet flushed with an easy victory!—Flattery, money, social honors, and promised reward, were the only weapons the Monsignori could use to thwart and baffle the schemes of the soldier King, Victor Emmanuel! With a rough hand he had swept the great possessions of the Church into the national coffers!

"Mees Isabel," the wondrously beautiful Egeria of a faded diplomatic Numa, was not without her *friends,* and daily *tempters!* For she was now a *power* in Rome!

"Find out what I wish to know, in America," said the passionate woman to a soft-voiced agent of the Vatican, "and I will give you all the reports of Rohrenberg's daily movements, and also copies of all papers to be reached!"

"It is well, my daughter!" said a courtly social ambassador,—a princely skirmisher on the outworks of the Papal party. "This is what *we* wish to know! Rohrenberg is in concert with Bismarck and his agents here! The great German is fighting his rival, Von Arnim, and we must

try and checkmate him! He has set the King on us!—But the Pope will rule *the intellectual world,* when haughty Bismarck is only a *powerless memory!* Arnim is our friend, but he *is doomed!* In the Iron Chancellor's hour of *final* defeat, he will often think of this battle of Sword and Gown! He will *know* then who pulled him down!"

"Now, I will have every secret inquiry made *instantly*, for you in America! Do you my bidding! Gold you shall have, and any further help you wish! Trust *me!* Trust *the Church!*"

As "Mees Isabel" gazed out on the Pincian, she chafed at the long delay!—"I *must* leave soon," she reflected.—For, in a lull at a grand ball, two nights before, the Russian Ambassador had whispered meaningly to her: "Madame! This is a *dangerous* place for *strangers!* Prince Demidoff will be here in a month, looking for some lost Crown diamonds!" A flash of her defiant eyes was her only answer, as she muttered *"Lâche!"* and turned her silver shoulder away. But the poisoned shaft struck home!

"Monsignor Rastalli!" announced the servant. The anxious woman sprang to her feet. Her visitor made himself easy. He sipped a glass of wine and murmured: "At *last,* I am successful!

—Here is *your* packet!" said the quiet ecclesiastic, as he handed her a document; "and *now*, my daughter, keep *your* faith! Time presses!"

Irene, (with crimsoned cheeks and glistening eye,) ran over the few pages of the inclosure!—She rose, and opening a locked cabinet, handed a slim envelope to the Monsignor!—Forgetting priestly craft, he tore it open in haste. Even a *"would-be Cardinal,"* can be excited!

"Ecco la!" he cried, in delight! *"Now,* one word only! I must be with Antonelli in half an hour! It *is* the draft of the secret agreement! Listen! You are not safe here a moment! Slander, scandal is *worse* than crime! It would defeat us all! Go to the Apollo Theatre to-night alone! My secretary will await you! Your maid is one of *our* people! I will ask Rohrenberg to *dine with me!* I will make him a personal visit, and bear him away! I have the best cook in Italy, and," the Monsignor sighed, "Rohrenberg is one of the *old* intelligent diners! If he were only *one of us!* You will soon be safe at Brindisi! Your maid will go on with you to Alexandria! You can send her away, once you are there! Antonio will do all! Keep your counsel! Leave a note for Rohrenberg that you have gone to the Theatre! And now, are *you*

satisfied? Count on *me* for anything! Here is my banker's address in Cairo! He will take charge of all letters! Do not use *any* name when you write me! There is a good credential!" The overjoyed Monsignor handed her a bill of exchange. It astonished *even* the rapacious world wanderer!

"I have all the news I wanted!" she humbly said.

"Ah!" said he. "Good! *Then* go with God, *my daughter!*" He waved his jewelled hand in mechanical benediction; and in five minutes his carriage was tearing madly along to the Vatican!

"This makes *me a Cardinal!*—Gallant woman!" the Monsignor cried. "I am the *first* to give Antonelli the one thing he craved! The one thing even *he,* could not get!"

Three days later, "Mees Isabel" was speeding through the Greek Sea in triumph!—Rohrenberg was wrecked for life!—In secret council, he was denounced by his betrayed diplomatic colleagues!—His liaison with "Mees Isabel" had been his downfall; for *all* the secret plans of the coalition were known!—The veiled Venus, the mysterious stranger, had fled!—She "left no dark plume as a token."—Oblivion followed her steps!

—Too late, all *too late,* Rohrenberg knew what sort of an *angel* he had entertained unawares!

On the *piroscafo italiano, Vittorio Emmanuele,* "Mees Isabel" laughed as she read the Monsignor's secret American report.

"Bah! *Va banque!* They are *all the same!* Gordon is making love to this milk-and-water heiress of a Maryland cow-pasture, at Fair Oaks! He is *lying to himself,* to suit his new bucolic fancy!—Beverly, *thank God,* is far away in South America, and will only arrive next year in San Francisco! The 'human beast' seems to disport himself as usual! I alone have *no place* in this *virtuous world! No* future! *no* hope!—Yet, there is *one* to whom I owe reparation! *Beverly Seaton, my gallant brother!* I have broken his *honest heart!* Pray God, I may never meet him! And dear old Doctor Selfridge is dead!" She was sobered *for an hour!*

She stood later by the rail, a nervous, robust, and triumphant modern Venus, gazing on the salt sea foam, from whence once rose her own prototype, the Aphrodite of old. "I'll meet *my Armand* soon! I will bring *him* gold! He will give *me* fame! Now, let the gambler spy beware!"

—As the *Vittorio Emmanuele* ran its sharp nose alongside a dozen of similar craft, lying in the

shallow bay, where the love-sick hero-coward Antony's galleys lay, after gloomy Actium, "Mees Isabel" surveyed the crowded harbor of Alexandria!

"Whose yacht is that?" she demanded of the obsequious Captain!—For a trim English steamer lay only two cable lengths away, flying the burgee of the Royal Yacht Club!

"Madame! *C'est le* Lord Alfred Beaufort, *son bâteau!*" said the wearied Captain. *"C'est un jeune Milord Anglais, qui vient d'entrer dans sa fortune!"*

"Perhaps *another* fool!" she sneered to herself. "No! Never *another* like Rohrenberg! Still, the flag looks friendly!—In this strange place, it *might* be of use to know this young English nobleman!"

Down went the anchor, (and in two hours,) "Mees Isabel" was *en cosmopolitaine,* at home, at the Hôtel du Nil! "Shall I go on to Cairo?" she queried, as she looked out on the dry tropic sands, where great Pompey once lay, the defeated master of the eastern world, a victim of an obscure murder!

She had seen Lord Alfred Beaufort pull by her steamer in his barge, past the strand!—He was a callow youth of the watery blue eye,—the

geometric trousers,—the baby stare,—and the "educated whisker!"—"*Un jeune Milord Anglais à la mode!*—He *looks* like a *club man!*" moralized the not over-scrupulous "Mees Isabel. "He needs *training!* I may have to *take him in hand!* But," she wearily said, "education is *not* my forte now!" —She shuddered. No! After the witty sallies of the Monsignor, all *other* men seemed to her to be only *blanks,—pawns,—fools!*

"There is one thing true," she murmured; "the Church *does* educate and refine!"

Two weeks later, before a splendid audience, the curtain rose in the hush of restless expectation on "Aïda."—On the right hand of the Grand Opera House, (veiled in silver sheen,) the debonnaire Ismail Pasha, (his harem screened from view,) smiled on his touch of the Aladdin Lamp! —Rows of court dignitaries, and officers in full dress, with the swell winter travellers of the world, gazed down on the superb stage, where the *old, modern,* and the *newest,* Egypt met in a dazzling series of social tableaux!—All is only a painted sham in Egypt to-day, save the silent pyramids, and the unspeaking sad-faced sphinx, gazing eastward,—asking always the one unanswered question!—Fit union of man and beast!—Fitly, she is *female;* for the *male* cannot alone perpetuate

his hereditary *vices!*—She, with *unpitying* lips, asks, to-day, the grim question of ages!

"Mees Isabel," in her box, was hardly settled in her snowy laces, before the richest Italian banker of Cairo sent in his card!—There was a little mark, which *she* alone recognized!—The Monsignor's minion!

"The Cardinal!" he murmured, under his breath.

"Ah! So *soon!*" she thought. "Pray be seated, sir!" For this banker's name was inscribed on her unused letter of credit!—After the last act, when the melodious tremors of the god-like tenor died in the underground caves, Irene, the world's waif, sent her card to the man, on whose silver accents the whole house hung!—He received her at the *side* door of the scene!

"Well!" he said roughly. "*Again!* No more 'Petersburg surprises!' Go *back to Demidoff!*" the sly Frenchman sneered, as he wrapped his stage robes around him, and turned away!

"Is that *all* you have to say to *me,* Armand?" the Masked Venus cried!—There was a shadow of heart-break in her voice! She never thought of her *useless, idle gold,*—it might have turned the scale; but she dragged her weary limbs back

to her *loge!* She had learned a rough lesson of life!

"He *too* is a *coward* and a *cur!* Where shall I turn? *Onward! Anywhere!*"

"Permit *me,* Madame!" said the silken-voiced banker! "We have all been desolated by your absence! His Excellency, Cherif Pasha, the Minister of Public Works!" In a *familiar* voice the banker whispered: "The *Viceroy's best friend!*" And the fat Egyptian Pasha gibbered fondly at Gordon's cast-off wife.

Two weeks later, Lord Alfred Beaufort strolled among the mimosa and fronded ilex of the Nile valley!—It was on the eve of a fête of the great "Cherif," (*the secret agent of England*).

"By Jove! She's *awful good form!*" said this most distinguished English youth, as he followed, with his monocle, a flash of a white cloak,—a laughing face,—a superb form,—and a flash of the rarest diamonds! *"Cherif a sa belle amie!"* A woman sped away, as the half-tipsy English magnate accosted, (with insular roughness,) the astute Cherif Pasha, Minister of the Interior of Egypt!

"Who is that *wonderful divinity?*" said Lord Alfred! The Minister of the Interior gazed at the

excited youth! *Here* was a point!—The statesman paused. For England!

"Look here! Lord Alfred! When that *next loan is signed,* I will owe you *something!* I will make you know this girl! But your father is a *great banker,*—and don't *you* be a foolish lad!" The Moslem was sly. And pretty women were swarming in Cairo!

"Cherif!" said the languid Englishman, "I *don't* want to *inspect the Nile,*—I don't *care* for your *sugar factories,*—I am *not* anxious about the *future of Egypt,*—but I *do* want to get that woman on my *yacht.* I want her to go around the world *with me!*"

A passing reveller chased the flying Venus to her lair! It was the remorseless Jenks. Beaufort,—(a game Englishman,) cried, "By Jove! *I don't like that!*" He sped away. For the shrill sounds of trouble arose!

Cherif Pasha balanced on his heels, (wild with unfamiliar wine,) till the shapely siren fled back to him!—There was an altercation which at last released her!

"Cherif!" she said, (and her voice trembled in its musical intensity,) "I want to *lose* that strange man who *followed me!*"

"And?" said the Egyptian.

"I will keep Lord Alfred's yacht for *two weeks* at Ismailia, until I have seen *your palace!*" the Venus replied.

"You *mean* it?" the Pasha growled, doubtfully.

"I *do!*" the siren resolutely said.—He darted out!—And *never* after his careless feet passed the gates of the great Cherif's mansion, did Horace Jenks appear to mortal man! He was a *"lost traveller."* Down in the reeds of the Nile, two weeks later, a ghastly *thing* was floating, which *might once have been a man!* Exit Jenks! The Nubian midnight swordsman had done his awful work. Cherif *never* grudged the price he paid!

"You are *now* satisfied? *Ma belle!*" said Cherif as the silver-veiled Venus stepped into the car which bore her away to the steel cruiser *Lancashire Witch,* for it was *good-bye!*

"Only if *he* does not come back?" said the wanton, with shining eyes.

"Maleche! The *dead* are surely safe!" cried the cruel Cherif Pasha, as he clasped a diamond bracelet on the lady's snowy arm! He made a significant gesture, with *his right hand,* which caused the belle Isabel to wonder *where* Jenks had spent the last hours of the evening of Cherif Pasha's splendid fête!

"At last! I am *now free!*" "Mees Isabel" cried, as she stepped under the English flag! "Beaufort will *protect me!* Jenks lies, still and cold, under the bushes of a silent Nile canal! No one can touch me *now!* I am *safe! Safe* at last!"

The dainty yacht sped away to Indian seas, and Lord Alfred Beaufort entered upon an education which cost him many a sigh; many an hour of wild remorse!

He was *lancé dans le beau monde!*

CHAPTER XIV.

AT FAIR OAKS! ORTON'S REPORT! "WE CAN WAIT!" WESTWARD HO! A LITTLE SUPPER AT THE CLIFF HOUSE, SAN FRANCISCO! "THE LANCASHIRE WITCH!" "'TIS THE MASKED VENUS!" "MY WIFE!" "MY SISTER!" "ONE OF US MUST DIE!"

THE fireside was a genial rallying place at Fair Oaks, when around its merry glow, Jack Gordon joined the sweet sisters from Fort McPherson, and gentle Marguerite Calhoun walked through the halls of her old home, a moving spirit of loveliness!

Maryland is a gallant border State! Standing

with outstretched arms, between North and South, it embraces both of the jealous sections of the United States in its loving grasp! It was no supine cowardice which held Maryland aloof from joining North or South, in the awful civil war. It stood to arms, mindful of what the "Maryland line" did for the *"old thirteen!"* "How sad to rive the heart in twain, between brothers who only fought, to unite in love again."

Gordon watched each mail with eagerness. He had not been four weeks at Fair Oaks,—he had only progressed in General Everett's interminable campaigns as far as "Chancellorsville," when one day a grave stranger sent in his card to the cavalryman:

PHINEAS ORTON.

He well knew this social signal of a professional nature.

"At last!" said Jack, and he walked into the library, as if he were on a forlorn hope. "Say what you have to say!" he muttered. "Only, be *brief!"* For his soul was worn with that "hope deferred, which maketh the heart sick." "I will know my fate at last!" he thought.

When Lieutenant Gordon bowed his visitor out, he returned to the library table, and dropped

his weary head in his listless hands. "I *know* absolutely nothing!" For all Orton chose to tell him, was that the fire which raged over Paris, had destroyed the last mortal relics of dead Isabel Percy!—Orton could afford to wait, before telling all!

"I give you the papers! They are all regular, Lieutenant!" said the detective. "Thank you, Sir!" said he, as he pocketed a final check. "I only regret that the war, and this national Commune horror, has defeated me in exactly carrying out your orders! It was impossible!"

Gravely Gordon said, as he dismissed him, "Mr. Orton! I hope I can repose the same confidence in your *discretion,* that I can in your *professional skill!*"

"I think so!" said the Pinkerton man, with a meaning glance.

A faint rustling of a woman's robe aroused Gordon. It was the loving one, who owed to him her young life.

"You are not well! You look agitated! What is the matter?" said the gracious lady of Fair Oaks. Gordon drew her to his side, and gazing out at the rolling hills of beautiful Washington County, said gently: "Marguerite! when the roses bloom again, will you be *my wife*? Kentucky is

not like your old home, but I wish to see your own *sweet, dear face* at Belvoir!"

Marguerite Calhoun laid her hand in his: "I will marry no man but *you!* I have loved you since the day you saved my life!"

"And before?" Gordon asked, smilingly.

"Don't *humiliate* me, Jack!" said the pretty châtelaine, as she fled away to join her most unruly guests. The roses nodded and smiled around the old home on this happy day!

General Everett, informed by some subtle freemasonry, essayed an oration at dinner, which brought rosy blushes to Marguerite's cheek. This effort was saluted by a gust of wild laughter from Flossie, who said archly, "You dear old prophet! I knew this secret ages, yes! *ages,* ago!" Gordon gazed around the table, and sought refuge and protection from the free-lance Flossie, in the tender glances of the woman, who watched, with love and pride, his now tranquil face! It was safe *at last* to take her home.

Two weeks later, Jack Gordon sat, as if stunned, in the room where Marguerite Calhoun had so recently plighted him her life troth!—An open letter was in his hand. It was signed by Josef Eschenbach, the still unsatisfied valet of the Stahrensteins. It told the whole shameful story

of the graveyard fraud, and of Irene's lying deceit. Gordon passed his hand over his blood-shot eyes.

"Am I dreaming? Am I in my right mind?" For the mere greed of gold had led the discarded servant on, to tell the story of Campoformio!—"I can give you all the truth! I can prove what I say! And the real woman you want, is yet alive! Your agent is deceiving you! Who knows how much she has *paid him?*" And so, poor Jack Gordon learned at last of the awful degradation of the "Masked Venus!"—His last ship was wrecked!

"I know not the *present* location of the woman you seek; but she is surely *alive;* and just the *same* as ever!" It was a crowning blow!—For two long hours, Jack Gordon, (with tears in his hopeless eyes,) communed with the gentle woman, who sat as still as a white spectre!—The words of the saddened man fell on her ear like a death knell.

"I have now told you all, Marguerite! *all!*" said the dejected soldier, "and what can *we do?*" His voice was eager. Its intensity was heightened by his eyes burning in a strange fever!

"My darling!" said his hostess, "you know I come of a race and church, which do not

admit any separation of what has once been joined, before the altar of God!—You ask me,—you ask *me,* Gordon, what we can do! Nothing!" said the loving woman, as she smiled through her tears. "Nothing! my love! We can only be true to ourselves,—*and wait!* Some day,—*some day!* my own, we can be all in all to each other!"

"I am bound," whispered Gordon, "in a *slave's shameful chain,*—but you,—*you* are free! My beautiful darling! It is too hard!"

"I am yours, till my last dying breath!" the mistress of Fair Oaks said simply. "I will marry no man but you! You can trust *me,* Gordon!" The soldier covered her hands with hungry kisses! Like a white rose, leaning on its bended stem, she stooped and silently kissed her lover! Marguerite Calhoun glided away to her hopeless sorrow, and left the despairing lover gazing at her vacant chair!—A stroke of the Gods!

"This *is* a world of surprises!" growled old General Everett, as he felt instantly the changed atmosphere of the home of sudden happiness!—"I think I will go over to Washington, and look up the other fellows at the club!"—Military prudence!—He would be "out of the line of fire there!"

Flossie, the invincible, moped around the

house. "I will find out this lurking secret," she declared, "if it takes me an eternity! yes! an *eternity!*" She stamped her little arched foot, as she uttered this piece of wisdom, and muttered, "*All* men are fools! Why, she's simply *madly* in love with *that man!* It is *unheard of!*" And with a pardonable pride, even in this unforeseen trouble, she said, —with a toss of her dauntless head,—"I am glad Gordon is not in *our* regiment! *That's all!*" Flossie had *her* ideas of discipline!

Alas! Miss Flossie's merry verdict as to this lovers' quarrel, was no help to the unhappy beings who repeated daily that sad refrain, "We *must* wait!"

In two weeks, Gordon quietly announced: "I think I will go out to California. Maxwell is thinking of leaving the service, and I must settle some business with him!" "That Will!"

"Where does he go?" said Marguerite, with an anxious glance, as General Everett protested against the loss, of such a promising young officer, to the service.

"He intends to marry Rose Durnsford soon, and go to Europe, and take charge of the foreign branches of the great steel works!" the cavalryman replied.

Marguerite Calhoun dropped her dreaming eyes; they filled with sudden tears. Miss Flossie flounced out of the room, with a "Parthian shaft at random sent": "I am glad that *some one* is going to be married!" She was of rigid ideas as to the Law of Contracts!

Before the eyes of the heart-broken Marguerite rose the tableau of that early gray morning on the far-away plains, when Iron Heart shielded, with his wounded body, the man who boldly faced death for her. "It is too much! I cannot face it! I must suffer *alone,* and in *silence!*" she cried, with a sinking heart.

"Go! my own! my only!" said the saddened woman, as Jack held her, *for the last time,* in his arms!—"Go, with my heart's love, and my soul's devotion! *Here,* I shall wait! here, I shall linger alone! A day will come when you can look me in the face and say 'Be mine!' But! Jack! My darling! I am *proud* of you!—and this blow almost breaks my heart!—My own soldier!"

"And you *will* wait, Marguerite?" Gordon asked in loving unrest. Her answer was unheard, as she threw herself, sobbing, on his bosom. He knew *now* that Orton had spared him a full report, to save needlessly rending his soul. He

departed mutely, and left the gentlest heart on earth breaking *in silence!*

Gordon's trip to California was accomplished in a dazed uncertain sorrow. A band of ice seemed to press on his temples. "Force, fraud, or fear,—what, had dragged the dark St. Cecelia down into the whirlpool of deceit and crime?" All lonely and unheeded flew by the autumn fields; all unnoticed, he crossed the dismal prairies of the west. He marked not the glories of the royal Sierras Nevada, with their dimpled, wooded lakes, crowned by icy peaks. For a past sorrow, a present bitterness weighed him down! No star of Hope sent down a single ray!

"I shall tell Maxwell all! Perhaps he can aid me! And yet I see no help! No present release; no *way out!*" He knew only too well Marguerite Calhoun would never yield a cardinal point of her ancestral religion.

"I am doomed to a life of sadness and silent shame! *One woman's work!*" thought the dejected man. His mental sufferings drove him onward, as a goad!—"If it were not for my trust in the mercy of God,—if I did not look to Marguerite's future,—I would end it,—*at once!*" he gloomily pondered. A morbid hatred of society, and of his own kind seized him. Beverly Seaton's

haggard face returned to him. "That fatal ring! What *was* the mysterious secret of the past? If I ever face Seaton, I will know the worst! Yes! By Heaven! he shall speak!"

On the train, the handsome young officer's sullen moods attracted attention. "He has been *wounded!*" thought a bevy of bright-eyed eastern girls; leaving all their summer flirtations behind them.—The distinguished air of the Kentuckian was not lost on these pretty travellers. Stone could not be more insensible than Jack Gordon was to the raking fire of their bright eyes!—For he *was* wounded; sorely wounded in his *heart of hearts!* His sorrow was all the more bitter that it gnawed in secret.

Dashing down into the golden valley of California, Gordon saw spread out, before him, the royal Bay of San Francisco. A côterie of army men, at the Occidental Hotel, greeted the young hero of K troop.

"But, for the life of me, *I* can't make Gordon out!" said Ratcliffe of the Engineers, who tried to show him the "local lions"!—"Jack was as frank-hearted and happy a *cadet* as ever shouldered a musket. His whole life seems to have been drizzled away in that cursed scouting!

Man delights him not,—nor woman either! I give him up!"

"Ratcliffe! old fellow! I'm not well! I am only waiting for Maxwell to come up from Los Angeles! I think I'll leave the service and go abroad!" In vain did the anxious headquarters circle strew Jack's table with club cards, bids to soirée and rout, and gorgeous barbaric displays, among the rising golden kings and their diamond-spangled queens!—It was in the early dawn of the growing bonanza splendor, and San Francisco's mad saturnalia was approaching!—Jack *would* not be diverted. His telegram from Maxwell at Los Angeles told him that Vinton would soon join him.

"All coming up! Harold Durnsford expected every day on yacht *Lancashire Witch*, from Yokohama! We will bring you back with us!"

The grave-faced Kentuckian watched the motley throng through the plate-glass windows, as the human tide rolled along Montgomery Street. "To-morrow, Maxwell will be here! Thank God!" murmured Jack, letting fall his *Army and Navy Journal.*

With a flourish, the hotel coaches drew up, with a load of passengers, arriving from Panama and South America. A haggard fever-worn tra-

veller strode to the counter, and as he laid the pen down, gazed in wonder, as Gordon watched him register: "Beverly Seaton, Valparaiso."

"*Gordon!*" cried Seaton, his pale face lighting up. "Where *on earth* did *you* come from?" he asked in startled tones!

"I am waiting for Vinton Maxwell! He will be here to-morrow; and you are the man *I want* to see, of all others." In a few hours, the once ardent friends had cautiously exchanged their itineraries of life. Seaton's eyes, deep set, and weary, told of the lonely vigils of unhappy years!

"I have come home, to close up my affairs! To do what I can for my people," Seaton simply said. "I do not care if I die at *home,*—or on a *foreign* shore! I've had no home, Gordon, *none since the war!*" A veil of sad reserve covered the two old comrades, who intuitively waited for Maxwell. He was the needed "side and angle" of the old triangular friendship!

"Some way, I must get into the dark recesses of that man's memory! I will tell Maxwell all! He must aid me here! Force will be of no avail with this proud Virginian! He *too* seems heart-broken!" So Gordon mused.

While the two friends waited for the mo-

mentary arrival of the Los Angeles train, next day, the spacious offices of the Occidental were littered with the extensive luggage of Lord Alfred Beaufort, the owner of the newly arrived *Lancashire Witch.* Servants, Lascars, and Japanese boys, hurried around. In the mass of trunks, gun cases, hat boxes, portable baths, and queer contrivances for the outfit of a Briton of grandeur, Jack Gordon observed several trunks labelled "Harold Durnsford," and in fact, a tall, alert Anglo-Saxon, (instinctively the mentor of the dilettante Lord Alfred,) was now fighting off a horde of social reporters, eager to fill the columns of several society journals with details of this real, "live Lord," and his past, present, and probable future! An Anglo-Saxon whale in a western Yankee tub!

An hour later, hearty, happy Vinton Maxwell brought new life, and a cheering good humour into the relations of the two Southerners, each of whom felt that the other had an important disclosure to make. Suspicion, more potent than any bitter open quarrel, brooded over the men whose care-worn faces were records of mental agonies past.

In the parlors above, sweet Rose Durnsford was eagerly telling her handsome brother of the

debt she owed to Maxwell and Gordon!—Robert Durnsford gazed with joy on his re-united family.

"By Jove! I will not let a moment pass till I go down and thank these noble fellows! Never mind formality!" Soon the four young men were in the warmest friendly converse!—Harold Durnsford was as hearty an Englishman as ever pulled a 'Varsity winning boat over the finish at Mortlake!—He gloried in the fearless devotion of the men who once shielded his sweet sister with their breasts. Maxwell knew now that his cause was won!

"Ah! Pray excuse me only for a moment!" murmured Durnsford, as Lord Alfred approached. After a brief colloquy, Beaufort claimed the whole party for a dinner at the Cliff House. "You see, Durnsford, *your* people need rest, after their long ride. I may sail at once for Victoria as soon as I can get cablegrams. If the boat is provisioned to-morrow, I'll go right along, have her refitted up there, and return to *'do the Yosemite!'* Now, you must not say No! We're all youngsters, and I will give you, later, a run to San Diego, when I come down."

"Then, Lord Alfred, you must make your own peace with Miss Durnsford!" said Maxwell, smiling. He was not sorry to see a little breaking

up of the icy reserve clinging to his gloomy friends; it could be done best, over a dinner table. "Even a *wine party* man may have its uses," Maxwell reflected. "For Gordon looks as if he carried a war arrow in his heart! What is this *new* sorrow? Poor Beverly! he, *too*, is more bitter than he was last year! Still on the hidden path of lost Beatrice? God grant that he never finds her! I will *not* indulge in a *tête-à-tête* with *either,* till we have the old heart feelings back again!"

Beaufort and Durnsford were alone in the parlors, and the young Lord blushed as he met Harold Durnsford's lovely sister. "I will hope to show *you* and your *father* my pretty boat, on my return!—The fact is, I have some—er, er—arrangements to make!" The Briton dropped his eyes, as he met Harold's frank gaze!—The "Masked Venus" must disappear!

"By Jove!" Beaufort thought, "I must let Isabel have a little run *on shore!* She has been tied down since we left Yokohama, in a wearying half solitude!"—It was a case of *Noblesse oblige!*

Harold Durnsford suspected this awkwardness! As Beaufort bowed himself out, he whispered to Durnsford: "I'll have Weston take a carriage

and take *her* privately out to the Cliff! I can't bring her to the hotel, of course!—Scandal, and all that, you know!" Weston, (running mate, volunteer secretary, and *fidus Achates,*) was speedily on his way to release the Masked Venus from her twenty-five days of luxurious prison-life, on the dainty *Lancashire Witch.* It was under a secret promise to her, that Beaufort had agreed to take the yacht at once to Victoria!—"I do not *dare* to risk American soil," Irene pondered, "and I must not tell *him* all! I can make my way from Victoria to Australia, or some other safe place. The wide world is *my home!*" said the stormy petrel!

Beaufort was much relieved when Weston's messenger reported back. A few words reassured him! "All right! I will take care of her, *out there!* I will order the dinner and wait your coming. Send promptly for me; I will have rooms all ready! She has the maid with her!—Weston *is* a treasure!" thought Lord Beaufort.

Lord Alfred breathed freely, for his social dilemma was now surmounted!

"Bad form, by Jove!" he thought, "to have any possibility of Miss Durnsford finding this thing out! Thank Heavens! I'll be *all regular* on my return!" For the boy already *feared* the

superior wit, and many wiles of the beautiful *anonyma!*

The sparkling stars were gleaming over the Pacific, placidly stretching in one lovely sheet to Japan, as the four young men sat at a table loaded with the spoils of the west.—The night breeze brought the soft roar of the breakers below, to their ears!—Two hundred feet lower, and only a few cable lengths away, on the three lofty crags fenced off with foaming breakers, hundreds of huge sea-lions were hoarsely barking.—From the crystal windows, the dancing lights of ships, coming and going, twinkled on the rolling blue waves! Far away to the north, Bonita light flashed from its rocky headland; and the narrow strait of the Golden Gate was mantled with its gray robes of fog, — from whence the boom of a mournful bell announced the rising night mists!

Wine, wit, and wassail, gave a forced mirth to the merry guests of Lord Alfred!—The old friends seemed to grasp at this accidental *rapprochement.* Around them, the sound of shrill laughter, popping corks, and bits of bacchanalian song, told of the never-ending revels of the Cliff House. As the extensive menu dragged along, Lord Alfred Beaufort, joyous at his landfall, gaily

ordered "t'other bottle"!—From time to time, Weston dropped in, as he was the social representative of his friend and master, at the table where "Mees Isabel" dined perforce in *his* unsolicited company.—The factotum had freely enjoyed the bottle, and his eyes gleamed with an unwonted fire!

In the midst of the royal repast, all four men started to their feet; for a crash was heard in the adjoining room, and a woman's voice, wild with passion, screamed, "Coward! Release me!"

Jack Gordon, with an ashen paleness on his face, sprang to the door, followed by Beverly Seaton, whose eyes flamed yellow in their *ferocious gleam!* From the half-opened door, Weston reeled out in maudlin fury!—A voice rang out which the *secret enemies* both knew too well! And then drunken Weston's babble,—"There's *your ocean beauty,* Beaufort! look out for her *yourself!*" Jack Gordon seemed dazed! His hand was clasped on the door! It was too late! Beverly Seaton tried to pass him. "'Tis the Masked Venus!" he cried.

"No thoroughfare!" said Lord Beaufort, calmly.

"Let me *alone!* I will go in!" the Virginian hissed.

"Not till *I* know *why!*" said the resolute young English Lord, as he grasped the door. "There's a *lady* in there, who is *entitled to my protection!*" Before he could utter another syllable, Beverly Seaton had hurled him heavily to the floor!—The servants stood in an affrighted circle. —Horace Durnsford grasped Jack Gordon. "Are you *mad?*" he cried. But he fell like a log, as Gordon's right arm shot out in a deliberate blow! Pandemonium reigned supreme!

Maxwell rushed after the two excited men who had dashed into the room!—As Durnsford sprang up to seize Gordon, he was rooted to the spot,—for Jack Gordon, clasping his hand convulsively over his heart, reeling into a chair, cried: "My God! *My wife!*" and Beverly Seaton screamed: "Speak! *Speak! Are* you, are you *not my sister?*"

Maxwell seized Lord Alfred, who, blind with rage, now sprang in at the door! "No! Not *here!* Not *now!* Great Heaven! This is Hell's *own work!*" The officer was bewildered!

Before the astounded men could turn, the "Masked Venus" glided swiftly past!—Her eyes shone like blazing coals of fire, and one jewelled hand was raised to ward off the sight of Beverly Seaton, whose lips framed not a single word!—

Beaufort started quickly down the hall!—Ere Seaton and Maxwell could aid Gordon, whose lips were working convulsively, a rattle of carriage wheels was heard, as Lord Beaufort dashed away. The grinning maid and maudlin Weston had also disappeared!

"You'll hear from *me* later!" was Beaufort's parting threat!

"Speak to me, Jack!" cried Maxwell, as he loosened fainting Gordon's vest. "Here! a glass of brandy, *quick*! Ah! My God! Seaton, look around for a doctor! The old wound has opened!"

And by the stricken man, whose blood was welling from the half-healed scar, which he gained in the "dug-out" on the Platte, Harold Durnsford knelt, sobbing, "Maxwell! I cannot fight the man who *saved my sister's life!* Oh! This is horrible, *horrible!*"

He caught Seaton's cold eye fixed on *him* with the deadly glance of intending murder!—Durnsford's Anglo-Saxon nerve returned! He was a loyal brother, himself.

"Seaton!" he said, "I am *innocent* of all! I never saw that woman till I *joined the yacht at Yokohama!* I have *never* spoken to her! It was once Beaufort's *secret* and is now, my *sorrow*!—God deal with me, as I speak the truth!"—The

solemn voice of Durnsford rang as if from an open grave! Beverly Seaton threw himself on a chair, and covering his wasted face, he burst into tears!

"That voice,—that face,—my poor sister,—an outcast, and *a midnight stroller!* Ah! God! This *is* the end!" he muttered, gazing blankly at Gordon; over whom a physician was now bending!—Summoned from a convivial party,—the surgeon calmly said: "Get him on the lounge! I can soon stop the hemorrhage!—*To-morrow* you can take him to town, but he dies if moved *to-night!*"

Around them, the clink of glasses and snatches of suggestive ditties, told of the cheap riots of the "Birds o' Night," now arriving from the theatres and cafés of the distant city!

Durnsford, in a low voice, communed with Maxwell: "Shall I *go,* or *stay?* You are the only sensible man I see!"

"See here! Durnsford!" bright-eyed Maxwell answered, almost fondly, "you can rise above any *mortal* standard to-night! Seal your lips! Hasten for *your life* to the yacht! Make Beaufort sail at once! We will take care of all here. Don't let him wait an instant. The yacht needs *no* customs formalities. If she is away before morning, you

will prevent *one* murder; and perhaps *two!* You may also save *your sister's* future happiness! I implore you! Life and death are in your hands alone! Be ruled! Be guided,—for your darling sister is *my promised wife!* I will keep guard over *your* honor as if it were my own!"

Durnsford bowed his head gravely, and went slowly out.—In the hall Maxwell silently wrung his hand. "I will *control* poor Seaton! Gordon is *helpless* for a month! Beaufort, poor foolish boy, picked up this beautiful fiend, *ignorantly!* This is a crowning sorrow, and *he* is the *real* victim! Now *go!* My brother!" said the gallant soldier, who sadly gazed on poor Beverly Seaton, who was slowly whispering: "One of us must die! *Which* one?"

Silence reigned, as Durnsford with a few words craftily explained all to the astounded Boniface!—A cold rain was falling as his carriage whirled away. "Twenty-five dollars," the Englishman cried, "if you make the wharf in an hour!" The coachman lashed his tired team along!

Beverly Seaton, (his face turned to stone,) watched over the pallid Jack Gordon. Drawn by an infinite pity, he stooped and laid his hand in reverence on Gordon's brow. "*My* brother!

The only human being who can share *my* misery!" And at last he understood the untold secret of the ring! "Will he ever live to tell me the *whole truth?*" In the vigils of this sad night, Maxwell and Seaton talked in whispers by the side of the almost pulseless Gordon. It was a night of woe!

As they unravelled the shadowed past, with its awful burden of sorrow, the fleet *Lancashire Witch* drove swiftly northward in the teeth of a rising gale. For Harold Durnsford's mission was accomplished!

A wretched woman, (through her blinding tears,) gazed on the great Devil's auction mart of the "Cliff House," as the yacht steamed by. It was agleam with the lights which shone on her disgraced husband struggling at death's door, and the heart-broken brother of her youth!—She dared not yet ask herself, "Whither shall I flee *now?*"

Four days later, Maxwell and Durnsford read the significant words of a telegram: "Outward bound steamer for Australia left to-day. I sail for Panama direct! Forward all my property there by Pacific mail steamer." It was signed, "Beaufort." And so, she was gone at last, the fatal siren! Murder was balked for once!

"Safe! safe, my brother!" cried Maxwell. "*Now* we must get Seaton away! He must go back to Virginia! If he *lingers here,* Gordon will surely go mad; and I fear also for his own safety! He simply sits and stares at Gordon!"

"What does he wait for?" the Englishman said.

"He will only say that he *must speak* with Gordon; and then he promises to go away. He is heart-broken! He has never since mentioned her name!"

Maxwell and Harold, in a brotherly conspiracy, kept Robert Durnsford and the anxious Rose, at bay! The sweet English lass, with pitying eyes, gazed kindly at the wan face of feeble Gordon, from whose eyes the last gleam of hope had fled!—"It is over!" the soldier muttered, as he turned his white face to the wall!

Beverly Seaton walked out of Gordon's room, after a long conference, *never disclosed to mortal ear!* Maxwell, on the watch, said: "Beverly! can you not speak *to me?*"

"Yes! Maxwell!" the wild-eyed Southerner calmly answered. "Go over to the train with me to-morrow! You will hear from me in New York!"

Without a sign, beyond the burning gleam of his hopeless eyes, Beverly Seaton parted from Maxwell, and took up his lonely journey east-

ward! He made no disclosure of his intentions! Two weeks later, Harold Durnsford led Maxwell into a quiet room. "Vinton, I have something very serious to tell you! Be your own self, and let *me* now help *you* and *poor Gordon,*—if *I can!*" his lip trembled. A cloud arose before the young officer's eyes! "Beverly! Speak! Be *merciful!*"

The Englishman slowly said, "Beverly Seaton killed himself yesterday at the Hotel Brunswick in New York!" Maxwell's eyes filled with sudden tears. He could not read the fatal words!

When Maxwell dropped the dispatch, he softly said, *"Poor Beverly!* Life carried him down in its whirlpool! God rest his soul!"

"There must have been *great deliberation,*" Harold continued, reading the telegram. "This was sent to me; it adds: 'Colonel Lomax sent for! A sealed letter for Lieutenant Maxwell mailed two days ago to *your care,*—so registry office reports!'"

"He wished to spare *me!* He thought of me *at the last!* Ah!" mourned Maxwell, as he walked to the window to hide the rising tears. "*One woman's work!* How shall we tell Gordon?"

The message from the dead was soon at

hand! It was dated only two days before the suicide. His hand had firmly penned these lines!

"DEAR MAXWELL:—I have left Seaton Hall to you! —Gordon does not need it. He is as unhappy *as I am*. I leave it to *you*, as I am the *last* of the unlucky race! Even in my lonely death, I am not ashamed to bid you see *me* laid by my father and the dear mother! Colonel Lomax has my full directions! I wrote him last night, so strangers cannot interfere with my last wishes! He will write you all. Take care of the *old veteran*, as a trust from me. God pity and pardon one poor betrayed and erring soul! If you ever meet her, tell her it was my last word to you, that *I have forgiven all!* But the *name* is safe,—not *openly* dishonored! I have destroyed *all the proofs* of a *certain deed!*—I go out, into the shadow land, from an unhappy world, with neither *fear*, *hope*, nor regret! I had sworn in my heart that 'one of us must die.' I will have kept my word when you read this. May your own bright manly presence bring back the luck to Seaton Hall! The Fates are against us!

"Love your dainty English Rose! You are worthy of each other! Dear old Jack Gordon knows my whole heart *now!* I did him unwittingly an injustice! I have never wanted to live, since I knew *who was the woman*, known far and wide, as the Masked Venus! Thanks for your brotherly kindness. I think of you fondly *at the very last!* —Look out for my colored people!"

There was not a tremor in the clear characters of the signature, "Beverly Seaton."

"A gallant martyr; defeated in life's battle at every turn, and yet 'a hero in the strife!' He saved her, the sister whom he could *neither guide* nor *control!*" Maxwell mourned. "Ah! before

her wayward feet, what unsounded depth of Hell now yawns? Jack Gordon is only a living wreck!" Vinton Maxwell sealed his bosom's book.

Escorted by gallant old Colonel Lomax, and a friend or two, Beverly Seaton "went home" at last, *forever!*

The wild winds and wilder waves were driving, far beyond the ken of her kindred, a woman haunted now by the haggard face of the only man on earth she ever feared. That dead brother —Beverly!

"How *old* Beverly looks! How *worn!*" And in desperation, she drank deeply of a dark flask, labelled *Cognac Supérieur!* "If I can sleep, I may forget Beverly!" This modern Helen,—this nineteenth century Messalina knew not, like her fair Grecian prototype, that "far away the brother of her heart" was sleeping under the long grasses! —The dim future hovered before her!

"Onward! *Anywhere!*" she muttered, "only *far from America.* But will they follow me?" She shuddered. "No! Beverly *will not,*—and,—and,—Gordon is a Kentuckian!" She burst into wild tears!

CHAPTER XV.

MAXWELL IN ROSY CHAINS! AN ANGLO-AMERICAN! BEVERLY SEATON'S LEGACY! DE BRISSAC'S STORY! LA REINE DES BACCHANALES! AT AVRICOURT! NEMESIS! "TELL MY BROTHER!" ONE WOMAN'S WORK! AT REST! "THAT TELEGRAM!"

Rosy chains they were, these lightly worn bonds, tying the ex-officer of the United States Army to the white cliffs of Albion; for the family party had long ago shaken the dust of irreligious San Francisco from their holy British sandals!

"By Gad! Harold!" said startled Robert Durnsford, when he learned of the untimely death of Beverly Seaton! "Let us go home! Let us leave this dreadful land! By Heavens! I'll do *something!* I'll see the British Consul! I'll—I'll—*write a letter to the 'Times'!* I'll—By Gad!" he said, with a lucid interval, "I'll go to the Bank, and we'll book the whole party, (Maxwell and all,) for home!"

"You dear old Papa!" said Rose, as she clung to him,—while he made a wild dive for his mackintosh and tightly rolled umbrella! He

clung to this, as the oriflamme of his order,—the "respectable" Briton! Even as the heart of Bruce was hurled to the front, in "the press of good knights and true," so that thirty-shilling silk-clad javelin of Durnsford's might have been used as a token of his arrival, dead or alive!—It was the "properest" umbrella on the Pacific! It filled the snob with awe! It paralyzed the police, intimidated the "hoodlum," and awed even the hackmen! It was "*so undeniably British!*"

"Mr. Maxwell *may* have a few words to say to *you*, dear Papa!" said Rose, mindful of her "Prince Charming!"

"Ah! by Gad! Rosie! You are right! Let me see! He's in the Royal forces! No! the *Marines!* No! the *something or other!*" Papa Durnsford *was* "rattled." He drew the blushing girl to his side. "See here! Rosie! Can't *I buy* his discharge? If you must have *him*."

"I must, dear Papa! I really *must!*" said the glowing girl. "Why, Papa! He's an *officer;* a *staff* officer! He's in the Engineers!"

"Gad! I'm glad of it," said Durnsford, reflectively!—"He can help run us home! I know Ismay, Imrie & Co.,—*and we* build lots of *engines too!*"

"*Dear* Papa!" said Rose; "*not* a *steam* En-

gineer! He's an Army Engineer, — *'forts and things,'* you know!" she said, doubtfully.

"Oh! I see! Well, *we* don't build *'forts and things!'* He may 'come in handy,' though, Rosie; we *do* build *'shells and things,'* and *they* knock his paper forts all to pieces!—Now, Rosie! *Must* you have this Yankee?" cried the old millionaire, who really liked Maxwell.

"This *very one,* Papa!" cried Rosie, as she stole a kiss on her tiptoes!

"Send Harold to me *then,* you young witch!" the old man cried, for his eye was suspiciously moist.—"Gad! She looks *like her mother."* And to the world-worn old man's ears floated back, softly, the chime of wedding bells, as Rosie's pretty mother once walked out of a Yorkshire church on his arm!—"I was a *proper lad then!* Ah! Times have changed! But I've got Rosie! The good Lord has her mother!" The old man's voice was still husky when he saw his mainstay, Harold!—"Sit down, *my son!* I want to talk to you about this Yankee lad! What sort is he, *any way?"*

"Father!" said the young fellow, impulsively, "he saved Rose's life on the plains; and he's *the best fellow I ever met!"* The old man lifted his dreaming eyes! They were far away in the green fields of "England," and he could still hear that

merry clash of the wedding bells of "auld lang syne"!

"See here, Harold! I want to go home at once!—Bring him to me!"

So, it was not so strange that Vinton Maxwell, (who dreaded now the care of the gloomy Gordon,) said to his blue-eyed Anglo-Saxon friend, "Harold! take your party and go back home!—Mr. Durnsford shuns the lawless American light thrown by the press on private life! These stories of poor Beverly Seaton have appalled him. I can't imagine that he would be happy to see your sister's picture labelled *'A Lady Friend!'* and thrown out to the happy possessor of *two cents,* on a press guaranteed to print ninety thousand scandals an hour!—I will get six months' leave of absence, and *then* resign! Lomax writes me that Seaton Hall more than pays its way, and that a bed of most valuable iron ore has been discovered there! We could get a great price for these lodes; but there's a silent trust,—a trust of *honor,* Harold, on *one-half* of the estate, until, —until matters change!" said Maxwell; as he bit his lip and walked to the window, for the choking tears would come when he thought of Beverly Seaton, alone, crazed, world-weary, and heart-sick, in that last awful half-hour at the

Brunswick!—The Virginia Light Infantry man was *"game to the last!"*

"So, do you now go on homeward! I will go with you as far as New York, and then close up my army accounts, leave the service honorably, and come over for a *Yorkshire welcome!"*

"By Heaven! You'll have it, Vinton!" cried the undemonstrative Englishman, warmed up in his shell, for once!—"We can use your *talent* and *skill* to brighten up our *slow-going* boys at home!"

"There's one thing!" said Maxwell, and his prairie-browned face lit up with a deeper crimson, "I do not wish to go in among your people, on any plane that would make me fight *up hill!* I am what you know me! An *American citizen, first and last!*—When Rose takes my name, she will be the sweetest daughter of the Red, White, and Blue!"

There was a flash of the old army pride in Maxwell's eyes as he said: "I would not give up my birthright to be prince or peer! Our *women* may hunt titles; but our *men* know their priceless *heritage!"*

"By Jove! Vinton!" said the tall Englishman, as he clasped his hand, "I'm with you, *shoulder to shoulder!* But," he said, pleasantly, "*you* won't need the 'chip on your shoulder' in our country!"

And the flash of the blue eyes, recalling the English lads at "Alma" and "Inkermann," faded away into the normal "blue china" glare.

Four weeks later, Vinton Maxwell and Harold Durnsford saw the *Persia* churn away painfully down the Narrows, and the last glimpse of Robert Durnsford showed him clasping to his bosom his two treasures,—his nonpareil daughter, and *that umbrella!* His cylinder hat was in a Bond-street leather case, weighing sixty pounds, with three brass padlocks!

"By Gad! Vinton! Let us hasten down and get a peep at your iron mine, for this parting makes me home-sick!"—Harold Durnsford here prevented a total paralysis of the optic nerve of his future brother-in-law, who thought he *still* could see the happy face of the Yorkshire Rose, smiling through her diamond tears, and whispering, "You'll come soon *to us,* Vinton!"

"If you lose *one,* you *lose both!*" said Maxwell, pointing to her beloved brother, a young son of Anak, in a remarkably violent colored ulster, which he wore with a nerve, simply paralyzing to the pre-historic dudes of those olden days!

"Ah! *very* neat! very!" was the last remark of Robert Durnsford, as he hovered around, the Nestor of this social tableau!

"You win the *double event,* d'ye see, Rosie?" and the old gentleman re-rolled his umbrella, strapped on a binocular, pulled himself together, and began religiously studying the item *"Fire Island"* in his boiled-lobster colored Murray. He was a true British tourist!

"Sooner *you lads go,*—sooner *we'll see you* back!—Have you *all* you want, Harold?" said the old financier.

Harold smiled! "Dear old Pater! I've *more* than I deserve! I have *you,* and *Rosie,* and *lots of tin!* I'll kill a few 'Bob Whites,' take a peep at these hematites, and we'll show Maxwell a run to Yorkshire hounds by and by, that will make him forget his long-haired Sioux Indians?"

"Do foxes *ever scalp?*" said Maxwell, with an assumed gravity.

"Ah! By Jove! *I dare say not!*" cried Harold, as Maxwell gave Rosie a last embrace; and silently repented calling up the memories of the day in the "dug-out!" For the little woman's heart was full!

"Jolly little girl is Rosie!" said Harold, as he gazed on the natives of New Jersey, hovering around, a Scythian horde! Maxwell looked at him in cold disdain!—"What a *callous beast* he is,—to speak so of *that angel!*"—The lover for-

got that the "callous beast" was the *angel's brother!*—It was reserved for Harold to discover "an angel," with incipient silvery wings, in the sister of some *other* pachyderm!

Two weeks later, Colonel Lomax, Maxwell, and Durnsford were seated around the time-blackened mahogany of Seaton Hall. Its manual polish had reflected the sighing faces of hundreds of lazy negroes who had groaned, in successive generations, over its lustrous surface!—"Tell me something of the *old family!*" said Harold, absently, as he gazed on the now dismantled hall of state! Maxwell's brow clouded. Colonel Lomax limped to a window, from which the "Lady's Walk" was visible. A white pyramid glistened at the end of the long line of silver birches and aspens!—In a quivering voice, the old soldier said, as he pointed to the silent avenue:

"There's a white stone flashes
Over Seaton's ashes,
As he lies sleeping
With his dead around!"

"Mr. Durnsford!" the old Colonel said, "I will some day lie *there*,—by Beverly's last wish, in the *family* cemetery. *We* intermarried with the *Seatons!*—Suh!" he said, with the soft intonation of the Virginian, "this hyere old property

came into the Seaton line from an *English lass!* It will soon *go to one!* I have hyere a bottle of old Madeira, put away when Bev.,—poor boy,—was born! Drink it with me! gentlemen!"—And the *last of the old line* drank to the *new régime,* as Maxwell gazed, glass in hand, down the silent avenue!

"Ah! See here, Colonel!" said Durnsford, "I'm awfully sorry! You must pardon me!" The old Confederate stood, in the light of the wax candles, pale and stately!

"I'm aware of youah courtesy, Suh!" he answered as he bowed gravely, and lifted his glass. "Gentlemen! *Miss Rose!* Please God, the *happy* Lady of Seaton Hall! I may not be hyere, Mr. Durnsford," said Colonel Lomax, "when your sister comes, but looking out on these dear old hills, where I got the wound that Sheridan's men gave me, pray tell her *all* I asked of the good God, in my old days, was to live and die at Seaton Hall! If I can't speak when *she does come,* the Shanando' roses on the old man's grave must give her my last message,—my message of peace and love!"

Durnsford took his hand, silently. "Colonel! I'll tell my *darling sister* this, and she *will know you,* as *we* know you!"

"Thank you, Suh!" said the old veteran, as he said huskily, "I'm going to finish some of these maps and tracings of that grand iron mine! We'll make the Pennsylvania Yanks open their eyes!" The old Colonel had helped to open their eyes *very widely* at Gettysburg!—Around the table, the two young men sat, as the descendant of the Cavaliers vanished.

"He's a *rare* old man!" said Maxwell. "He shall rule here, until the signal, 'Taps!—Lights out,' comes for him!—Jeb Stuart never led a braver rider!"

"Right you are!" said Durnsford. "Now, Maxwell! one word! You have a fortune here in this matchless deposit of ore! Let's hie away home and see the dear old Dad! I suppose you won't mind *seeing Rose?*" Maxwell, (with a blush on his face,) drank to Robert Durnsford!

"See here!" said Vinton, "two weeks will do me to push the accounting and resignation business, at Washington! You can run on to New York! I've some business with De Brissac, of the French Legation!" For (in his pocket,) Maxwell guarded a letter from that distinguished Gaul:

"I understand that you are an executor of the late Mr. Beverly Seaton, and also a friend of Captain John Gordon, U. S. A. I wish to see you soon on a private matter; for

I shall take a steamer for Europe shortly!—I am tired of a land, where on the altar of profusion, one offers up the stomach to the 'American Cook!'—Ah! what glorious possibilities of a *national future*, if you only had the *cuisine française!*"

"I am sorry to lose you from the Corps of Engineers, Maxwell," said gallant General Humphreys, its chief, as he favorably endorsed Maxwell's resignation, with a sigh. "Will you not let me *hold this back* a few days? Think it over! *Civil life* has its *vicissitudes*, you must know!"

"I thank you, General! but I wish you would forward it at once to the Secretary of War," Captain Maxwell answered. "I have been left a valuable estate in Virginia! A trust from a dead friend! I shall go abroad and see the great world! After my marriage," and the young Captain actually blushed, "I shall return to develop a valuable iron mine on my Virginia property! I can, thus, give good employment to the suffering blacks of the old régime, who still linger helplessly around the plantation!"

"But your *military* future?" the General added.

"Ah! General! Our country has no definite policy,—no well-defined classes! There is no permanence, save in our federal judiciary!—Our citizens pop up and down, (socially, politically,

and financially,) like 'Jack in the Box!'—Even the *regular Army and Navy* may be swept away by some economical Congress! We fear no foreign foe! We are waging a brutal war of final extermination against our outraged Indians! Aided by rum, and organized land thievery, the uncouth louts of the frontier manage to throw the Army, (which has *no* quarrel to avenge, *no* laurels to gain,) against a desperate foe, forced to the wall by governmental duplicity and bad faith! 'The Indians have never *broken* a fair treaty; we have never *kept* one!'—so brave old Harney said after forty years' experience! The *respectable* government officials are ashamed to *look* at an Indian! We have given them only vice, disease, and rum, and greet them with the sly hand of the thief, or the murderous volleys of a decent soldiery, unwillingly pushed into these disgraceful battles! In a future *civil* war, I should take no part! *I am a Northern* States Rights man! In the *Indian campaigns,* my blood has boiled to think that we only *reiterate their tribal wrongs!*

"General!" said the young soldier, "people may sneer at Christian sentiment, but our brethren of the *church alone* seem to see the crowning disgrace of the closing century of American Independence! We paid for slavery's bitter curse,

with national blood and tears! The thunder voice of God *may* demand of our rulers yet: 'Cain! Where is thy brother?' Forty years ago, the black-robed priest, with outstretched arms, could go in safety, unprotected by weapons, from the Missouri to the great Cascades of the Columbia! To-day, Generals Crook, Terry, and Gibbon, will *fail to make that trip,* with a brave army backed with its artillery! I would not leave the service, if there could be any imputation on my courage! I have fought for *the nation's integrity!* Duty and self-respect keep me from seeing my innocent brethren of the army, and their brave soldiers, butchered by a desperate foe, fighting on their own lands, and defending their helpless babes and women! Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, to-day, in their distant fastnesses on Powder River, are as clearly heroes of Liberty, as the gallant farmers who fought the British soldiers, from the hedges of their farmyards, on the great day of Lexington!"

"Maxwell! *you are right!*" said the grizzled old General. "Let me have the pleasure of seeing your sweet English Rose, when you bring her back to us! Go, my boy! and God bless you!" cried the veteran, as he warmly said adieu!

Behind the Little Big Horn, the maddened

and despoiled savages were gathering, and at Fort Abraham Lincoln, in far Dakota, gallant General Custer was now mustering the Seventh Cavalry for its awful ride to death!

While Vinton Maxwell, (not without a sigh,) doffed his uniform at the Ebbitt, next day, he gazed at the acceptance of his resignation with a serious brow. A knock interrupted him!

"Show the gentleman up!" said the new civilian. He held the card of Phineas Orton. "That woman again! The Masked Venus! The wrecker of hearts and lives!" Maxwell's heart swelled proudly, as he thought of lovely Rose Durnsford. "Angels, devils, and fallen angels, *all* have the *same* right to the mystic name, *woman!*"

"Can you give me a couple of hours?" said Orton briskly, as he made himself known. "Captain Gordon telegraphed me to come out to him at Fort Abraham Lincoln. He has given me a letter for you; one he would not trust to the mail!" Maxwell's eyes were moist as he finished reading the sad epistle. Its last words were: "Let Orton tell you all! When you say good-bye to Marguerite, spare her the knowledge of how low a once innocent girl can sink, in life's abyss of shame; *her* gentle heart has now its full burden of sorrow!"

"How does Gordon look?" Maxwell said, turning to the detective, who was keenly eying the picture of Beverly Seaton, on the mantelpiece.

"He looks like a restless ghost; only the wreck of his former self! Captain! that man is burning out his heart and soul! I never knew a sadder case! I had hoped that *Brayton* would clear up the whole mystery!"

"Who?" said Maxwell, in bewilderment.

"Why, Alfred Brayton! *that man!*" said he, handing Maxwell the picture of dead Beverly Seaton!—"But *he, too,* had his secret sorrow! He is a gallant fellow! I was his second, when he killed Stahrenstein at Nice, over this handsome she-devil! Where is he?" continued Orton, who had not noticed Maxwell's growing astonishment!

"See here, Orton! Tell me the whole story, from the time you met him at St. Louis! That man was my friend, *Beverly Seaton,* and he died by *his own hand* at the Brunswick Hotel!"

Orton sprang to his feet. "Fool! fool!" he cried. "Thank God! I can *now* believe in Jack Gordon's innocence of Egbert Neill's murder! I see it *all!* This woman I hounded down, was Gordon's wife,—and——"

Maxwell finished, solemnly: "Beverly Seaton's sister!"

The shades of evening were darkening the room, before the two men closed their confidences. Maxwell's face was fixed in tensely drawn lines of care!—"I shall go over to-morrow to Fair Oaks, and say 'good-bye' there. Does Gordon know all you have told me?"

"No!" said Orton, "for I watched him closely, and I even suspected *him, till now,* of some complicity in Egbert Neill's murder!"

"Wait for me here then, quietly at the hotel, till I return!" said Maxwell.

"I will!" said Orton, "as I must see Baron De Brissac of the French Legation! He can also tell you a great deal! I will arrange for that! De Brissac will talk, when he sees that I know all! Poor Seaton! He really died to save his *erring sister's life!* Now, I can astonish *you!* Horace Jenks was found dead in Cairo! Murdered probably by revengeful Greeks, in order to get back gambling winnings!"

Vinton Maxwell drew his breath hard. "I must not let *Harold Durnsford* meet this man! He alone knows that the Masked Venus joined Lord Alfred Beaufort at *Cairo!* A piece of her own devilish work! I must keep silent! I fear that he hounded her down, and in despair, she may have used her ill-gotten gold as a last resort

to effect his 'removal'! How long! My God, how long, will *this woman* go unpunished?"

"All right! Then we meet to-morrow night! Don't write a single word to Gordon to increase *his* sorrows! I fear that he may follow Seaton!" said Maxwell, with a significant gesture.

"Trust me, *I have a human heart!*" said Orton warmly.

The two young men clasped hands in friendly alliance. When Vinton Maxwell walked down the stately avenue of Fair Oaks, the next day after his two hours' conference, he turned and saw the sweet lady of the manor, gentle Marguerite Calhoun, watching in adieu the young knight, who was now happily departing to wed her dear friend, the English Rose. Maxwell was aware of a choking in his throat, as he waved his handkerchief in a final salute!

Pale, graceful, lovely in her long and patient waiting, her heart was filled with thoughts of her steadfast hero in bleak Dakota! Marguerite glided back into her refuge.—"I *must wait* still! wait upon the goodness of God! Wait for the day when Gordon can come to me with unclouded brow! May God be with my own soldier!" The fair woman's eyes filled with tears. She knew too well the ferocity of Sioux

and Cheyenne! A spirited Southerner herself, she was too sadly sure that the tall Kentuckian would be in the "very foremost and focal flame," when the great tribes met the white army, in their last great death grapple!—"If he could only leave with honor! Ah, no! If he is alive, Jack Gordon will be found at the head of 'K' troop of the Four Dead Captains!"

"Captain Maxwell!" said Orton, as he welcomed the officer, "I have gone over the whole matter, as far as you would wish, with De Brissac. He is now about to succeed to the family honors, and thinks of settling down. In fact, he goes to France for a contemplated diplomatic promotion and marriage. He will tell you all, but only *on the steamer;* as he wants it out of any one's power to involve him, till after the marriage!"

A week later, Orton touched his hat, leaving Maxwell, De Brissac, and Harold Durnsford, (a leading group,) on the deck of the outgoing Cunarder. Orton's last act was to hand Maxwell a sealed letter. "This will give you the assistance of Josef Eschenbach, who was the confidential valet of Stahrenstein!—Should you be called on to act, use him! This letter will place him at your service! No! *no money!*" said Orton, resolutely. "Captain Gordon has *paid me all!* I

will write you regularly, and if you need my help, cable or write! I can see now that *you* cannot see this woman dragged to her punishment without *breaking Gordon's heart!*"

At Fort Abraham Lincoln, Gordon, amid the bustle of "mustering squadrons," read Vinton Maxwell's parting letters!—"God bless him, and the sunny-faced English bride to be!" murmured Gordon, as he wondered what gift of suitable richness, he could order for this sweet recruit so soon to come under the American flag.

Seated on the deck of the steamer, plowing the Atlantic's rolling green waste of waters, Vinton Maxwell learned from De Brissac of the continued European exploits of *La Reine des Bacchanales.* "No such fallen star has ever glittered in the dark purlieus of sin. Reckless, and wondrously beautiful, she now drives madly along, and astonishes even the most depraved, who imitate her dress, manners, and glaring vices!—She is a woman to be afraid of!" said the *newly reformed* Vicomte. "I have *never* seen her equal in Satan's cohorts!"

A month of golden happiness succeeded Maxwell's arrival in England. Led by his gentle captor, he speedily familiarized himself with the warm-hearted home surroundings of the little

lady, whose last few weeks of girlhood were drawing to a close. Harold's absence at Essen, closing some protracted negotiations with Krupp, was the real cause of the delay in giving Maxwell the woman of his heart. A telegram from Harold called Maxwell over to Germany. "I may need your technical experience here! If I dispatch for you, run over! I will bring you safely home, tell Rosie!" So Harold had written: "And we also can see De Brissac and his wife in Paris!" For the gay Gaul had outstripped Maxwell in the race of Hymen. He was already *un homme rangé.*

"I will be back in three or four days!" said the expectant groom. "There are *no Indians* here; save a few handsome *East Indian* officers!" Maxwell laughed. "I will trust your father to keep them at bay!"

"Right you are! Captain! They shall not steal Rosie!" the jolly millionaire called out from behind his *Times,* a convenient conversational bomb-proof, in rear of which he *apparently* studied the money market, but *really* took his naps!

Six hours in Paris enabled Maxwell to become master of all Josef's *recent* knowledge of the fugitive wife!—Warned by a telegram, Josef joined the Captain on his arrival. Maxwell

marvelled at the kaleidoscopic changes in all the varied brilliant colors of gaudy vice, of this magnificent wanton.

"*Monsieur! C'est une femme absolument sans cœur! Une vraie fille du Diable!* I have followed her for the last four years, and been sent from time to time to try and negotiate with her for the return of the diamonds stolen by that young fool, the Grand Duke ————! She has thrown me carelessly a few napoleons, and then,—laughed in my face!—'The Czar! bah! He will not drag his *nephew* up to the bar of justice as a common thief! Even a Muscovite *mouchard* dare not kill *me! Then* they would *never* know!—As for me,' she sneered, 'I have my *own* diamonds! I do not need to borrow from the Czar's loving womenkind!—I know nothing, absolutely nothing!' said she, as she would drain a glass of creamy Roederer, with a merry wink. 'To the Czar! if he asks me *personally*, I may tell him—to ask his *noble relative!*' and she would smile slyly with those cool, insolent, devil eyes, staring me out of countenance." The valet paused,—"I have now told you all!" He continued: "I *fear* that woman! In twenty years' confidential service, she is the worst and most heartless of the common lot! Nothing will ever touch *her* flinty nature. She

said to me the last time we met: 'Josef, I would like to have you in my service, but you *know too much!*' So I *do!* The poor Baron Rohrenberg, disgraced and chased out of society, a laughing-stock, *her* dupe;—Da Silva, the handsome Portuguese noble, ruined by *her* mad extravagances, now a private soldier of La Légion Étrangère;—Warburton, the gallant English military attaché at Vienna, kicked out of his rank, every club door shut in his face;—the dead Stahrensteins,—and all of this *her* record!—Some desperate dupe will some fine day *strangle* her, in a fury!—She is fearless as any imp of Hell, and now *openly* carouses at the Opera Balls, in that uniform of the white silk fleshings, diamond belt,—and black velvet shade, which have made 'the Masked Venus,' the star of *la haute canaille* all over Europe!—Thank you, sir! If you need me, telegraph! I will join you! I can at least *frighten her* for you, for," he lowered his voice, "I have the vial of drops, (*the heart tonic,*) she used to get for Adolf Stahrenstein to give to his gallant old brother Max!—rank *poison*!" the revengeful valet hissed, as he pocketed a roll of notes.

Vinton Maxwell telegraphed Harold Durnsford, and sat late that night, smoking unheeded cigars, as he wondered at the dark record of the

fugitive, while the narrow French *wagon-lit* dashed along toward the German frontier!

"I won't sleep till after the baggage is examined at Avricourt! Then, Mr. Krupp, I will hurry you up! Back afterwards to old England for the Rose of Roses!

"But is there no release,—for Jack Gordon will never give a clouded name to Marguerite!—Sweet, delicate woman as she is, she clings to her old faith! Only the divorce of Death! There is only one finale to the career of this voluptuous witch which will give Gordon his freedom!—And who can tell when *that* will happen? Poor Jack!" Maxwell dozed, till, with a wild chorus of yells, the frightened passengers strove to release themselves, as the cars rose sideways, and an awful crash followed! When Maxwell recovered his senses, he was lying on the sparse grass by the roadside, his clothing dabbled with blood, and a peasant's coat under his head. "What's the matter?" he muttered, carrying his hand to his head, where the matted hair clung to a deep cut! —"Where are we?" He struggled to his feet and began to question those near, in French. For a motley crowd was assisting the train hands to drag forth dead and wounded from the confused wreckage. The engine lay on its side, hissing,

and its escaping steam gave forth an unearthly shrieking sound! A line of low straggling houses was near! Already eager men, with lanterns, were moving around. A hundred stout arms dragged out the helpless!

"You are *near Avricourt!* On its outskirts! A broken rail has done all this!" said a sympathizing Gaul, handing a flask, from which Maxwell eagerly swallowed a heavy draught. "I am all right now!" said the tough soldier, as he groped back to the car to try and save the hand baggage, with his papers and passport!—His marvellous escape was only due to travelling in a rear wagon! Fortunately the wreckage was not *yet* on fire! In five minutes, Maxwell and all the rescued, were asked to give their names, nationality, and other personal details to the Chief of the Gendarmerie, who, with an old notary, was making up a formidable *précis*.

Maxwell's turn came. "Ah! *'Un Américain! Viens!*" cried the excited Brigadier of Frontier Police, shivering in his showy frogged coat. *"Il y a quelqu'une qui demande un Monsieur qui parle Anglais!"*

"Certainly, *I* speak English!" cried Maxwell.

Fifty yards to the right of the track, in a cottage, its hospitable walls ablaze with light, a

wondrously beautiful young woman lay helpless on a peasant's couch! Her face was undisturbed, but the bystanders murmured, "She is dying, and *that* she cannot know!" From the *waist down*, the unknown beauty was already dead! A splinter of hard wood had transfixed her spine!

"*Dépêchez-vous! Monsieur!*" said the old physician. "*Elle va mourir bientôt! Quelle beauté!*" The surgeon murmured, "I will *not* give her opium till *you have done!*" Maxwell, bruised and bleeding, approached. The woman cast her eyes wearily on him. He started back!

"My God! *Beatrice Seaton!*"

"Who are *you?*" she said, as a film thickened over her splendid eyes!

"I am Vinton Maxwell! Jack Gordon's best friend; and the man who rescued Beverly Seaton from Elmira Prison!"

"Ah! quick!" she said; "I want a notary! I want *you* to write for me! And *you* are Vinton Maxwell?" The lovely woman, struck down in the proud insolence of joyous animal life and glowing beauty, felt a feeble fluttering of that wonder,—the organ sentimentally termed *the heart*, really a model double-action pump!

"*Dépêche-toi!*" whispered the son of Galen, as he gave the dying beauty a stimulant! A glitter-

ing fire burned in her eyes! She tried to turn her shapely head. "If *Beverly* were here! Oh! my God! To die like a dog!" Maxwell stood aghast.

"Write quickly!" she murmured. A pitying woman wiped the foam away from the lips of the dying beauty.

"A notary! *My will!* Write!" The physician motioned the crowd away!—The Brigadier and the old official entered!

"Ah!" said the Gendarme officer. They uncovered in the royal presence of death. *King Death!* The Conqueror! Maxwell, with pen, ink, and paper, gazed on this beautiful wreck of mortality! His kindly eyes now said, "Ready!"

"Begin," she faltered, "I, Beatrice Gordon," she said, as a spasm shook her, "being of sound and disposing mind, hereby make my last Will and Testament!" Maxwell, with flying fingers, remembered that her father was a lawyer. "I give, devise, and bequeath my entire estate, real and personal, to my beloved brother, Beverly Seaton, of Seaton Hall, Virginia, United States of America."

Maxwell's eyes gazed pityingly on the dying woman. "You can not *give to the dead!*"

"Speak!" she hissed, with a supreme effort!

"Beverly Seaton *shot himself* at New York, after you saw him last! His desperate duel with Stahrenstein broke his heart! He never forgot *killing Adolf Stahrenstein!*"

"My God! *This is my punishment!* My brother *killed* poor *Adolf!*" and the tired head fell heavily on the coarse linen pillow! In fifteen minutes, she opened her eyes. Maxwell was at his post! —The surgeon whispered, "I have done *all* I can! Be brief!"

"Gordon?" she whispered, as Maxwell bent over her.

"Would *never* accept it! Beverly left *his half* to me! Your *old servants,*" he softly said. Her fading eye kindled.

"To Vinton Maxwell, then, in trust for the colored people belonging once to the late Judge Monroe Seaton! And I appoint said Vinton Maxwell to be my *executor without bond!* Quick!" she muttered "the pen!" and the trembling jewelled fingers of the Masked Venus touched the pen for *the last time!* In a few moments the physician and Brigadier affixed their names, and the grave-faced notary took the papers, which were instantly read. He bowed, and began his work.

Maxwell gazed on the prostrate woman with

eager attention. A peculiar light was in her eyes! The fluttering fingers motioned the strangers away! —Maxwell leaned over her!—*"A priest!"* The Brigadier saluted and went quickly out into the growing dawn. Maxwell watched the fast-expiring woman, whose splendid dark eyes *never* left him, even for a moment!

"Tell Gordon I was driven on by madness to save my life! I am sorry! I was alone,—poor, —friendless!—Sorry! His heart—break! *Forget!* Forgive! *Beg him!* Hunted down like a beast! I was *driven* to my ruin! The prey of men! . . . *If* I could live!—*if* I could go back!"

"And Neill?" said Maxwell, as the notary affixed his seal to the paper, and gravely noted the time.

"Jeered me! *Scorned* me! I only asked to be *righted* to save my honor! *He* laughed and sneered! I struck blindly! With one kind word, I would have *gone away!*—Oh, God! Here," she faltered, "in my bosom, *a packet!—The receipts for the diamonds!* Bleichröder, Berlin! Send them *back!* All the moneys take away! In my trunks, jewels, —jewels, all, *all* for *the poor negroes!* Maxwell!" she faltered. He was very close to her trembling lips now. "Bury me *here!* My name, only *Beatrice!* You, *you,* by *Beverly's* grave, pray to God! For-

give, *forgive!* Beverly, *brother!* I tried to save him *my* disgrace! Ah!"—and with a sigh as light as the summer wind rustling the trees, the sinful woman was at rest!

Maxwell crossed her lovely hands on the marble bosom, waxen in life's passing warmth, and laid across the sculptured face, (proud in its sad, unearthly beauty,) a handkerchif which had last touched the cheek of the pure English girl, who was now waiting for him at home in her childhood's nest!

At the door, a gray-haired priest, with crucifix in hand, crossed himself, as he moved forward and knelt beside the Silent Beauty!

"*Orate! Fratres!*" he began. His voice was as hollow as the sound of the falling clods on a coffin!

The *Work of One Woman* was *done!* Two days later, Harold Durnsford, and Maxwell, still pale and shaken, stood by an open grave in the little glebe of Avricourt! With rare delicacy, the Englishman never spoke a word! Before the coffin lid was closed forever, the blue-eyed Saxon strode forward and gently laid upon the breast of the "Queen of the Bacchanales" a cluster of pure white roses!

"For *Beverly's* sake, from *Rosie!*" he softly

said, as Vinton Maxwell gazed in wonder at the brother of his heart!

Far from her native land the Masked Venus sleeps! Alone! Forgotten, in the sad oblivion of a lonely grave!

Before Maxwell had returned from closing up the affairs thrust on him at Berlin, the Russian Foreign Office wondered at the *anonymous* return of certain jewels through the American Ambassador at Berlin!

The costly ornaments and the flashing diamond belt of the Masked Venus, sold and converted into ringing yellow napoleons, were handed to the old priest of Avricourt! *"For the poor!"* said Maxwell, simply, as the two stalwart "Heretics," knelt to receive an old man's blessing!

Grateful strangers wreathed the simple white stone with votive flowers; the stone on which was carved one simple word, *"Beatrice."*

And when Maxwell left the lonely mound, and turned his eyes to where the *one dear woman of the world* waited his coming, he laid aside a few leaves from the grass springing over the once loved Lady of Seaton Hall!—His voice trembled as he said, *"For Beverly's sake!"*

Joy bells were ringing a fortnight later at Robert Durnsford's home, "The Grange," as the

cheery best man, Harold Durnsford, led Maxwell, "the captured American," up to the matrimonial ordeal!

By tacit consent, the *days of Avricourt* were not referred to! Bridal favors were gaily fluttering on lad and lass, as the handsome American took the "Rose of Yorkshire" from her happy father's hands!

A smile lit up Maxwell's soldierly countenance, as the sunlight broke through the morning mist, and gilded with God's radiance, that delicate and womanly face, which had gazed on him in mute supplication, when the wild Sioux charged the little stronghold on the Platte! He was repaid at last!

It was the brightest sunshine of Maxwell's life! In his pocket was a cable dispatch. "Dear old Jack!" thought the ex-officer, "the future *lies as bright as mine before him now;*" for the last words of the cablegram were: "Come home! Shall go to *Fair Oaks* when this long scout is over! *Maryland bells will ring!*"

"At last! *At last!*" Maxwell's heart leaped up! "Jack and Marguerite are no *longer bound* by an iron fate to suffer in helpless silence!"

As the merry village bells rang out at the Grange, Marguerite Calhoun, with a white face,

was scanning at Fair Oaks the telegraphed rumors of a great Indian summer war!

And Jack Gordon, the Captain of "K" Company, of the stern "Seventh," waved his sabre in a parting salute to "Sweethearts and Wives," as he led his troop down "Officers' Row" at Fort Abraham Lincoln, and marched away to the Rosebud, listening to the strains of "The Girl I Left behind Me"—for he had heard "Garry Owen" for *the last time!*

CHAPTER XVI.

A MORNING AT FAIR OAKS! THE ENGLISH ROSE AT SEATON HALL! AT RENO'S HILL, ON THE BIG HORN! THE KENTUCKIAN AT BAY! "GET ALL THE WOUNDED OVER!" A SOLDIER'S REQUIEM! SERGEANT GAVAN O'BRIEN'S TRUST! THE GENTLEST SISTER OF THE SACRED HEART! A RIDERLESS HORSE!

A MERRY circle gathered around the breakfast table at Fair Oaks, on a sunny mid-June morning of the Centennial year of 1876! Marguerite Calhoun, as hostess, ruled a varied assemblage. Old General Everett, gouty, but "still in the ring," glared at the journals, wiped his glasses, and opening an apocryphal letter, gazed sidelong at the sharp-eyed Flossie!

"I *must* run over to Washington! Must see a man at the *club,*—old classmate!" he continued. Flossie's eyes darkened! The General's gout was always a little keener after these "*business trips!*" Several of the other convives were busied with

their letters, and did not remark saucy Flossie's sally:

"Why, Marguerite! You are wearing the 'Seventh Cavalry colors' to day!" It *was* true that a pretty knot of the richest crimson ribbon, bound her snowy throat, this lovely morn. Flossie hummed: "Somebody's Coming," to the sudden discomfiture of the graceful hostess!—Maud was deep in the mysteries of a letter, in which a certain First Lieutenant of Infantry told that he had effected *finally* his exchange into the "Fifth Cavalry!" "That settles it!" she joyously said, *sotto voce,* for *she,* too, dearly loved a horseman! —With a tact, born of long experience, she avoided Flossie's all-seeing eye. Vinton Maxwell stole a tender glance at the prettiest Rose of Yorkshire, (his girl wife,) while the triumphant Flossie clapped her hands and cried "Spoons! Spoons!" These blushing married lovers addressed themselves, with humility, to that varied correspondence, which is a mark of exalted cosmopolitan social rank! With perfunctory regularity, Harold Durnsford crunched his toast, and swallowed several cups of tea,—gazing in inane admiration of that bright young "Ithuriel," Flossie, whose spear was now in every one's side!

"I *wonder* now, is she only chaffing me?"

manly Durnsford groaned, as he opened a letter from the lonely head of the house!—"Last night, she solemnly told me she *hated*, just *hated all* Englishmen! That's intended as a settler for me!" He gloomily waded through the "Pater's" loving lines. "Dear old boy! He *will* have me set up this new furnace here, at Maxwell's mine! By Jove! I've an awful furnace *in my heart!* The Pater *will* work off his loneliness! What a game old boy!"

Before Marguerite Calhoun lay an unopened letter, destined long afterwards, to rest upon the pure bosom of the sweetest woman in Maryland! —There was a touch of "Custer's crimson" on her face, as she rose, when the little gathering began to break up!—The wicked, roving eye of Flossie rested on "that letter!"

"Will you walk with me, Miss Everett?" said Durnsford, with an absurd humility, addressing the sparkling "Queen of Hearts," Flossie.

"Are you *detailed for service* to-day?" said the madcap, gazing into his honest cobalt-blue eyes!—He writhed in helpless uncertainty.

"I er,—-I rather,—that is to say, I am at *your* service!"

"Oh!" said Flossie,—and she sagely rumi-

nated. "*Then,* have the horses brought around! —I wish to make some purchases at the village! I will *not* walk with you! A member of the Fifth Cavalry *rides!*" She *was* a member; and the dainty witch swaggered around the table *en officier*. "Besides," said she, "you *ride* much better than you *talk!* I can *see* you, and I am thus spared your cold *Anglican* criticisms of the 'Land of the Free!' I give you just ten minutes!" and she disappeared like a flash. . . . Her fresh young voice was heard, far above, carolling "Some day! *Some day!*"

"By Heavens! I fancy she thinks that I am *really* a howling idiot!" said the pessimistic Briton. "I suppose *I am!*" He stole a glimpse at his disconsolate face in the glass, as the guests filed away to the portico; for the lovely hostess was absently reading Jack's last letter.

"I must speak to that young 'terror'!" growled General Everett; "she treats Durnsford as if he were,—as if he were,—a—a *chimpanzee!*" finished the old veteran; catching gratefully the first word, with a sense of great relief! He was *not* unmindful of the £ *s. d.* which backed Harold's generous wooing!—"Her dear mother was just such a madcap *once,*" sighed the old veteran, as

he "scooped" all the morning papers, and, drawing forth his cigar-case, wandered away to a quiet corner!

"I don't more than half like the looks of this thing on Powder River! Crook, Gibbon, Terry, Custer, all in the field! Well! there *ought* to be enough,—if they don't fight, (as usual,) scattered in squadrons! By Heavens!" growled the old soldier, "I believe I will get a *few points* from 'Gall,' 'Sitting Bull,' and 'Crazy Horse'! We always strike them, ready for us, in a bunch! *We* fight *them* with 'corporals' guards!' Damme!" he cried, with a rising gorge, "*they* have no blasted War Department to give them feeble instructions, smacking of paresis! No *journals,* to daily publish every secret plan to the world! These Indians have no Congressional traitors, interested in *first,* stealing reservations, and *then* supplying guns and cartridges to the hostiles, just to get up a profitable war!" He chewed his cheroot ferociously!—"And these fellows will know *a whole week before* the fight, just *who* is to deal the blow, and *where* it will land! The *noble* Frontier!"

The old war-horse sneered, as he threw down the hated papers. "They've whipped Crook *twice* already! He, *of course,* had all the force he

asked for! Well! If poor George Custer strikes them first, he will *go through* them, or *jam his whole command* into soldiers' graves; for there's *no go back in Custer!* If he only had *two* regiments,—but, he can't get a heavy command!" General Everett glared in the direction of Washington. "Simpson!" he called to the butler. His cabalistic motion was understood! As the fiery old cavalier swallowed the "morning refresher," he shook his fist *again* at the distant Capitol! "I'd like to see some of these 'lead-pencil soldiers' take a half-hour's gallop with Custer! We don't get *troops enough on the line!* That country is just swarming now with Indians!"

Pretty Flossie interrupted her irate father. The steeds were pawing on the gravelled walk. Harold swung her up dexterously. As she gave a farewell peck at the veteran's gray moustache, (this careless motion representing a kiss,) the Englishman writhed!—"Takes it as a *matter of course!* Old brute!" he growled. He was in danger!

Marguerite, standing in the arched doorway of her fairy castle, smiled on Flossie, the young "Sioux-American" beauty! Her own shining, tender eyes told the young gadfly the whole story!

"I *suppose* Captain Gordon will send *you* his

best Kentucky horse, soon!" Flossie cried, as she cantered up the avenue, with a devil-may-care flourish of her whip!—Durnsford pegged along, as if riding to hounds, after absently lifting his hat, in adieu! He was "in the toils!"

"Can she really be *mad?*" he thought with certain hideous misgivings. "By Jove! she's a *most extraordinary person!*" This was *strong language,* for Harold.

Maxwell, thinking over his letter, walked down to the station with General Everett. There was that professional confidence between them, which animates the educated soldier.

"See here! Maxwell, my boy! You know that country! *I* would just like to have command of the Department of Dakota for two months!"

"What would you *do,* General?" said Maxwell, whose heart was with Jack Gordon of K troop.

"Do?" cried the old growler. "Do? What any man, *not in his dotage,* would do! Mass the troops! Get Crook, Gibbon, and Terry together! Give Crook and Gibbon the Infantry! Mass the Cavalry under Custer, Merritt, and McKenzie! I would rush Miles up, and mount his veteran

Infantry! There's a big Indian village in there; I would go in, with *troops enough* and drive these yelling long-haired devils to Behring Straits! *That's what I'd do!*"—And the old General swung his cane and made a "right cut" at a jimson weed, which laid the intruder low!

"Don't *excite* yourself, General!" said Maxwell, who really loved the old "game cock."

"Ah! my dear boy!" said General Everett, "I know George Custer's proud wounded spirit! He fears no foe in front! He goes 'with a sigh for those who love him, and a smile for those who hate.' He can't get any decent command! He's the 'chopping block' of this administration! By Jove! I can see that long-haired Michigan boy, as he lugged off on his shoulders, the table that Sheridan gave him;—the one Lee signed his surrender on! And Custer has the white flag of truce, which humbly signalled the end of the war! What is his *crime?* Is he too *brave;* or too *honest?* I know the Indian ring! Some one has clouded the mind of the President! It's a shame, and it won't end well! They should have let the Michigan boy *go home, before he 'whopped' Mr. Fitz Lee and Rosser,* if they didn't want him!"

Maxwell remembered the old barracks at

West Point!—He thought of many surreptitious night visits to the "cock-loft" of barracks, where "G. A. Custer," was smoked upon the bright ceiling with a candle flame! He, too had worshipped the gallant "Boy General!"

"*Autres temps, autres mœurs,* General!" said Maxwell, bitterly. "Loyalty *is at a discount* now! It *pays* to be an American citizen, in these 'piping times of peace'!"

"I'll see the men in the Department!" said General Everett. "Watch over Marguerite!" said the tender-hearted old dragoon. "If anything *happens to Gordon,* it will kill that sweet girl!"

Maxwell saw the angry veteran disappear!—"No!" he said, reflectively, "Marguerite is one of those fine souls who suffer and are strong!" and even in his hour of supreme happiness, Maxwell's eyes clouded, as he thought of the "K" troop!—"Jack!" he softly said, and the far-away sound of reveillé floated on his ears once more! He heard merry Jack's voice calling, "Tumble out! or you're in for a cold 'late at reveillé!'" And once more he saw the curly brown head and laughing eyes of his dear "chum!"

"What *can* be this hidden trouble?" said the Engineer. "If Custer divides his regiment, he

won't be supported! I hope he won't play the *Washita tactics* on the *wrong village!* I know *how* they stand," he said gloomily; "it's about *seven* to *five!* If Gordon were only out of this *regimental row!* Now here's a letter from Gordon!"

"I never saw Custer look so dejected! Wallace said to me yesterday, 'He never looked that way before; he will be killed in the next fight!' I think we are running into some trap! I doubt the loyalty of some of our scouts! If we *hit* the big village, they will be neatly fixed for us!"

That gallant prophet could not look forward to the veiled mystery, soon to be sealed with blood, at Custer's Hill! In the subtle premonition of a soldier's death, Custer *himself* never dreamed that fifteen years after he was fated to lie, with open staring eyes, surrounded by his gallant dead, the victor—(Sitting Bull)—would be miserably butchered by a detachment of the Eighth Cavalry! Gallant *Wallace,* spurring his horse, (on the broad Indian trail,) could not see the hand of Death beckoning to his own troop commander, McIntosh, then at his side, and warmly listening to his words. It was strange that McIntosh should die on the very field they were racing to, before *even the doomed Custer,*— and stranger still that when the ill-fated Seventh,

(now marching to its bitter defeat,) would take a bloody revenge for the five companies massacred on the Big Horn,—that Wallace *himself,* (still in the pride of early manhood,) would die in the glorious hour of victory, and in fighting the *same wild foe!*

The devious path traced by the finger of Fate, was to lead Wallace back to die in the same lonely lands, his last moments cheered by the fierce yells of the exasperated "Seventh," crying, *"Remember Custer!"* Grim painted Sioux, *now* crouching in their lair, and eagerly waiting to entrap the feeble column, little feared that December 29th, 1890, would see them mowed down in revenge for the work of that sunny Sunday afternoon of June 25th, 1876; when the five fluttering silken guidons of the Seventh were plucked away from cold hands, only powerless in death!

Maxwell gazed on his letters with little interest! For his heart was far away to-day!—He ran them over,—Orton, Josef, and Colonel Lomax! He began with Orton!

"I cannot get away from this Egbert Neill case!" wrote Orton. "The Public Administrator of Los Angeles County, Cal., has directed me to

obtain the final proofs of Jenks' mysterious murder at Cairo, so that he can divide the rancho 'Las Flores,' and, giving Agnes Herndon her share,—sweep Jenks' estate into the public coffers! So the gambler's money goes back to the people who contributed unwillingly to his professional enrichment!—I shall be in England for a few months, clearing up his affairs there. Can I do anything for you?"

"Orton must see *me* on his return; I'll drop him a few lines!" murmured Maxwell. "And *now,* Mr. Josef Eschenbach,"—smiled the Captain, opening a bulky envelope, with a full description of the "Hotel Eschenbach," in Paris, and floridly promising good cheer! "So you have settled down to fleecing *the general public,* as 'mine host'! It may keep you out of jail, Mr. Josef? I *will* bear *you* in mind!"

While he gazed at the few trembling lines, penned by the old Confederate, he heard a sound of clattering hoofs, and Miss Flossie cantered up, Harold Durnsford riding proudly at her side, with the air of a conqueror.—There was a downcast look in the eyes of the young Scythian free lance, (for the first time in her life).—Maxwell sprang to his feet, as he read the Virginian's brief note!—Miss Flossie disappeared, her cheeks burn-

ing with a strange crimson; and the sound of hysteric laughter, joyous murmurs, and feminine excitement came from the drawing-room, where Marguerite Calhoun and Maud, (with affected horror,) watched a very trim and dainty girl, gazing nonchalantly at the ceiling, and flecking off the dust from her habit, with a pretty riding whip!

"I'm *engaged!*" said the defiant young Atalanta.

"Who can it be?" cried the astonished hearers.

"I sympathize with the *man!*" said Maud, with widely opened eyes. "This *is* a regular 'crusher'!"

"Oh! It's *only* Harold! He took advantage of my loneliness to tell me—"

"What?" cried both listeners at a breath!

"*Never mind!*" the hoyden said, as she raced up the stairway!

"Harold! we must go back to Seaton Hall at once! Colonel Lomax is very ill! We will take the afternoon train! Poor old boy! I am afraid this is the beginning of the end! I'll have Rose get ready at once!"

Durnsford crimsoned to his ears. "Of course I must go with you, but,—but,—but *Maxwell!* It's awful rough on a fellow, *you see!* Why, I am engaged *to be married!*"

"You?" Maxwell roared, in spite of his deep concern for the old Colonel! "How long?"

"About a half hour,—*rather longer!*" said the matter-of-fact Harold, consulting his watch in some embarrassment!

"And I presume to that *young person* who went on this memorable ride with you?" said Maxwell, viciously!

"Yes! *That's the one!* Flossie!" replied Harold, rolling the name on his tongue, as if it were a delicious verbal morsel!

"I'm *sorry* for you, sir!" Maxwell remarked, with due military hauteur! "See here, old boy!" the Captain continued, seizing the sighing swain by both hands. "You *are* getting a loving and lovely girl! You must go and explain *the trouble* to the ladies! I will have General Everett bring the two girls over, to stay a week with us! That will ease your heart! But you will have to learn all the dear old hero's campaigns by heart; and Flossie will lead you *such* a dance! She will have to break the terrible news to the General!

But, you should leave him a little note?—Make it a model of military brevity,—*about like this,*—and don't forget *all* his *rank and titles!*—He stands on ceremony!

"'SIR! I have the honor to request the hand of your daughter (Flossie) (Maud) in marriage. An early reply will oblige,

"'Your obedient servant,

"'HAROLD DURNSFORD.'

"This same formula will do for *both,* but I *advise* you to specify the *particular* girl you desire! I think *one* will be enough for you! Are you sure it's *Flossie* you must have?"

"*Quite* sure. See here! I fancy that you are chaffing me!"

"Go and join your captor!" said Maxwell, as the two "high contracting parties" were forced to join the reunited circle.

A chorus of exclamations assailed the culprits: "What *will* the General say?" What he really *did* say later, as the three anxious guests were hurrying on to Seaton Hall, and the General returned, filled with anxiety, was:

"Great guns! This *is* sudden! Come here, you young Ironsides! How did you capture this gallant Englishman?"

"I surrounded him, and made him call for quarter!" answered the unblushing young Yankee privateer!

"Yes! He did *call* for *quarter!* I suppose he *called* you '*darling*' for a *quarter* of an hour! My child!" said the natty old General, (who was not unprepared for this "*surprise,*") "do me one favor!"

"What is it? Anything to please my dearest, kindest father!"

"Make him throw away that mustard-colored ulster, with the green and black checks, before you marry him! It looks like truckling to British influence!"

"I promise you!" said the young demon, with dancing eyes. "I *knew* you would like Harold!"

"Why?" roared the old Boanerges.

"Because, because *I* love him dearly," and the sprite was mixed up in a tangle of gray moustache, two loving arms, coat lapels, and all the anatomy of the old hero she could embrace!

Moonlight, pale and ghostly, streaming in over the thickets blooming with the fragrant Shenandoah roses, fell on the white face of gallant old Colonel Lomax. The rustling pines were silently sighing in the fragrant night wind!—A shaded lamp

glimmered in the room, where Maxwell and Harold gazed reverently at the dying man's face. The sweet English Rose, with frightened eyes, was chafing his nerveless hands!—In a corner, watch in hand, stood grizzled old Doctor Talliafero, who had seen Lomax ride out with Jeb Stuart to hew his way through Gregg's Division at Gettysburg! —Custer and McIntosh well knew the gallant Lomax, who had hurled his regiment madly on the lines of the dashing "Wolverines," and the inflexible "Dragoons."

Lomax feebly turned his eyes toward Maxwell!—The young Captain bent over his dying friend. "Burn *all* my family papers!" he whispered. "You can tell me *now,*—I am going! The little girl I taught to ride! Where? *Where?*" he hoarsely whispered.

"*Dead,* far away in France!" Maxwell softly said, with a glance at Rose!

"Ah! I know *now!* Poor Beverly! *My little lost one!* Beatrice! Our baby girl!" He dozed a moment, and the only audible sound was the hollow ticking of the great old clock on the hall-way landing!

Lomax's faded eye brightened. "There's Jeb Stuart, on the line! He waves us *on!* Ah! See

John Pelham work those guns!—*Now,* boys! For Virginia! Sound the *charge!*" His head dropped.

He had joined Stuart in the Land of Shadows!

A week later there was the last mound, a fresh red heap, added to the Seaton line! The birds were singing merrily, and with thoughtful delicacy, Maxwell took his party back to Fair Oaks. Durnsford said nothing, but he pressed Maxwell's hand gratefully. "I could not bring the 'Little Woman' into this house of mourning! It is better too that even Rosie should leave the old Hall for a few weeks!"

A week after the party returned, Harold Durnsford sat on the porch at Fair Oaks. His honest face was wreathed with smiles!—The grim General had received him with effusion, for the all-conquering Flossie had paved the way of smoothness. "By Jove!" the veteran said, "we will have Maxwell and Rosie to alternate with yourself and Flossie between here and England! I think I will take a run over, (if I can get my leave extended,) and see your good father!"

Harold was delighted!—This hegira would relieve him from respectfully waiting to escape, (anxious for Flossie's society,) while General

Everett carried on that interminable history, which had, even now, only reached the "crossing of the North Anna!" General Everett seemed to stick in the "Wilderness" part of his campaigns, and Harold, (essentially a man of peace,) feared that the veteran might wander *there* for *forty years,* like the Israelites! "At this rate, he won't *take Richmond* till he is a great-grandfather," sighed Harold to saucy Flossie, who said, (with an unusual burst of confidence,) "Don't *mind* papa, Harold! He makes up these old *ghost stories* as he goes along! I'll tell you how to escape!" the roguish witch whispered.

"Tell me, and then I'll give you a kiss!" said the obedient Briton, who had already discarded that famous particolored ulster!

"I don't wish *the reward,* sir! But get Simpson to bring papa a good *mint julep,* and you can always escape while he drinks it. He can't *drink* and *talk* at once!"

Harold pondered over a long letter from his father. "If I could have chosen for you, myself, I could not be happier! She's a rare, jolly little maiden,—your little Flossie!—Bring her to us, as *soon* as you can!"

Three days later, Maxwell, who was forced to

run on to New York on business, was lunching at the University Club, and an old friend approached. "See here, Vinton!" said he, drawing him aside, "I want to have you meet Fenton Dennis! He is world-renowned as a good fellow, and he has a letter for you from De Brissac!"

Around the table the friends spoke of the rising star of De Brissac. *Un homme très sérieux* and a *model* husband. "Tell me of the divinity, Maxwell, we all worshipped in Paris as the Masked Venus! Do you know where she is?"

Maxwell's brow was dark. "God *alone* knows, Dennis!" said he. "She is dead!"

Fenton Dennis started. "Dead! That glorious modern Aphrodite?"

Maxwell briefly recounted the last hours of the marvellously witching woman. He breathed freer, as he saw that Fenton Dennis had not divined the real name, or antecedents of the "Queen of the Lost Ones!"

"Captain! I've been 'on the turf' for forty years as boy and man! I thought I knew all the ways of the world! I can tell you that woman taught me what an instrument of God's vengeance, a thing of ivory shoulders, gleaming eyes, and

witching deviltry can be! I only knew at first, that she was an American; when I met her later, she had a wild craze for 'absinthe' and, 'emeralds'! She was a born devil, and sang like the thrill of a nightingale,—with that proud, passionate, pleading voice!—She strewed her own dangerous path with human wrecks! She proves my theory as to the heartless, unsexed, coming American woman! Goethe was right, the old sage and voluptuary.—I believe that he remarked, 'When in the Devil's path we tread, woman's a thousand steps ahead.' By the way, did *she* leave any one *to mourn?* Husband,—brother,—child?"

"Not a soul!" said Maxwell, with a steady eye. "She was *alone* in the world!"

"She *ought* to have been! I'm glad she *was!*" said the old Club cynic, as he selected a cigar and bowed his way out. "The *déclassée* American woman stops at nothing! She was only a beautiful fiend from Hell! I thank God, she broke no honest man's heart; I had feared she had! That would have been *her greatest pride,* I fancy!" Fenton Dennis sauntered away, and as he lifted his hat in courtly salute, did not notice Maxwell, (with a lump in his throat,) thinking of poor Jack Gordon, who was to ride down into the fatal valley of the Rosebud the next day!

"One woman's work!" Hers was *almost* complete!

"Saturday night! I can nicely reach Fair Oaks for a Sunday dinner! If Jack Gordon were only back,—what a jolly double wedding! The Cavalry would carry off all the honors! He will be here soon, please God! Dear old lad! *It's his last scout!*"

As Maxwell stepped out of the carriage at Fair Oaks on the sunny Sunday afternoon of June 25th, an anxious watcher glided out to meet him. It was Rose,—his darling wife.

"Vinton! My husband! Thank God, you are *here!* Poor Marguerite has had a letter from Captain Gordon, and she is almost dying! There is one for you too, but we dared not open it! What can it be? She lies moaning; and the girls are both frantic! General Everett won't say a word!"

Maxwell folded his wife to his bosom. "Come along, Little One!" he said, with affected cheerfulness; "it will all come out right!"—In the Library, General Everett handed Maxwell the letter, without a word. Harold and he, grasped Maxwell's hand silently. The Captain read, with a sinking heart:

"FORKS OF POWDER RIVER, *June* 13*th*, 1876.

"DEAR MAXWELL:—Our wing left camp on the 10th, (Reno in command,) and have found the biggest Indian trail on the Continent. I fear the worst, and *we* will be in the thick of it. The Indians know all our plans; several of the guides have deserted, and the Ree scouts are chattering with fear. I would give my 'Norfolk' to have *Buffalo Bill* with us to-day! A last express is going back. I send this! We may strike them any moment! It's the old thing: We *unite* to *subsist*, and *divide* to *fight!* Just the *opposite* of what we *should* do! If we could only get to Crook and Gibbon, we *might* whip the Indians, for we would have *then*, three thousand good men! We are a weak column, between our reserves, and honest old Terry is fighting Sioux Indians *from a steamboat!* It is ludicrous!

"Now Maxwell, these *may* be my *last words!* I don't think we will come to good! *Two* or *three* men can ride quicker than *seven hundred*, and I think that we are practically betrayed! I've left *all* to Marguerite, with a *reminder* to you! Should anything happen, be a brother to *my promised wife!* The fates seem to be against our union! Tell her that I am, in life and death, *hers alone*,—and always.

"*Yours* for the old days,
"JOHN MARSHALL GORDON.

"P. S.—I have written to *Marguerite!* You won't have any news for two weeks! The enemy are over on the Rosebud and Big Horn! Fifty wagon loads of Winchester rifles and cartridges have gone up this summer! You know who *sends them!* I send you my class ring, for a memorial, if I should get knocked over! "JACK."

When Maxwell raised his eyes, Marguerite Calhoun (never to be Marguerite Gordon,) was gazing steadfastly in his eyes.

"Does he write *cheerfully?*"

Maxwell looked her in the face and *tried to lie!* He could not!

"Let *me* see the letter!" the White Lady said, as if speaking in a dream.

"I can not!" Maxwell began. "My God! Help me!" he cried, and the three men carried the fainting woman to her room, for she had reeled and fallen in Maxwell's outstretched arms!

While the katydids were chirping merrily in the foliage around Fair Oaks, eagle-eyed Jack Gordon was standing on Reno's battlefield, with Pete Foley, his bugler, holding Norfolk, as well as his own steed. A carbine was in Gordon's hand, and close beside him was Sergeant Gavan O'Brien, the light of battle in his dauntless Irish eyes. A line of less than two hundred men, (dismounted,) was fighting in the timber, with clouds of yelling Sioux screaming "Yi—yi—yip!" dashing around, raining in bullets, or crawling down in hordes! For it was on that Sunday afternoon when Reno's troops had seen Custer file away to his death, with his five brave companies! Along the fated "Greasy Grass," a *thousand* fighting Indians were pouring on Reno's line, with *another thousand* to come!

"We can't hold this position long, Gavan!"

cried Gordon, as he regularly fired his carbine! "Pete! watch Norfolk!" he ordered, as the thorough-bred madly plunged at the sight of the yelling Indians! "Sergeant!" said Gordon, as he threw in a fresh cartridge, "if I don't get out, take *my* horse, and leave *yours!* Take him back to Miss Calhoun at Fair Oaks! She'll watch over *him* and *you!* My God!" Gordon yelled. "Here, Foley! Sound away!" For *Reno had ordered the retreat! "There go the Rees!* The cowards!" Gordon shouted, for the timid *hired* scouts had fled!—"This command is *lost!* If we only had a soldier to lead! Tony Forsyth!" Gordon saw the shadow of doom!

"Stay by me, boys, and anyway see all our men out! Don't leave a *single* wounded man behind!" Gordon's smoking carbine dangled in its sheath, and springing on Norfolk, (pistol in hand,) he and his two henchmen made a fighting knot of three! The Sioux began a mere butchery!

A mad rush for the river followed, the frantic commander, Reno, leading to the high bluff, throwing away his empty pistols!—In plain sight, the gallant McIntosh was hacked to death as he fell! A circus clown could have led the battalion out better than Reno!

Gordon, in command of the rear guard, halted on the bank as the retiring mass floundered across the river. "Get all the wounded over! Hold on, men!" Jack called, as he emptied his heavy revolvers, into the victorious foe, now closing down! The disorganized column was scurrying up the bluff on the other side, its "commander" leading! A few scattered brave men were fighting in groups, and General Custer's devoted column was far out of sight! The reserve was lumbering along on the other side, miles away! Jerking out his carbine, Gordon fired deliberately, as the Sergeant and the bugler seconded him! With a snort, Pete Foley's horse fell dead! Gordon, his stern face lit up, leaned over, and catching the race rider by his arm, he yelled, "Get my stirrup! Now, Gavan! It's hopeless! *Over, all of us!*" And grasping wounded Foley's collar, Jack Gordon spurred the game Norfolk into the deep river! Stout-hearted Sergeant Gavan O'Brien reached the farther bank first, and then wheeled, firing calmly at the yelling pursuers! Up the bank, the splendid Kentucky charger sprang, and a couple of stragglers dragged Pete Foley to the hill. The wounded bugler was saved!

"Now, Gavan! Are they *all* across?" Jack

Gordon turned at bay. The red regimental necktie was fluttering for the *last time* in the breeze! Jack drew up his carbine and deliberately shot an Indian who was knifing a wounded man on the other bank! "You devil!" he cried as he pulled the trigger. And he thought, *once only,* of the dear waiting eyes of the White Lady of Fair Oaks! It was "Good Bye, Sweetheart!"

"Captain! *For Heaven's sake!* Let's get up the hill! Holy God!" cried Gavan O'Brien, as his horse dropped with him under a volley, and then handsome Jack Gordon pitched heavily from Norfolk's saddle, and fell at Gavan's feet! Norfolk dashed madly back through the turbid river! Jack fixed his eyes on the game Irishman, who had seen his father die!

"*Don't* let them scalp me, Gavan!" faintly said the dying man. "*Tell her*—" his head fell, and with fifty Indians within a hundred yards, the gallant Kentuckian lay dead at the ford! Dead on the field of honor! "One Woman's Work"—was finished on the Big Horn!

Over Gordon's body, a wild rattle of shots from the maddened men now forming on the hill, sounded the dauntless soldier's requiem! The Sioux recoiled!

"Shoot that *devil on Gordon's* horse!" cried

a wounded man, who, sheltered behind a rock, was firing with deadly effect, on the brown assassins, dashing over the river to rob the dead! O'Brien writhed quietly around! His carbine was still loaded, and he snatched Jack Gordon's pistol *from his dead hand!* Within fifteen feet, the hideous painted face of a Sioux brave, mounted on "Norfolk," was rising over the bank. Gavan O'Brien held his breath! The Indian was almost near enough *now* to strike Gordon's body with his "coup stick." He thought that the Sergeant was *disabled!* His heavy revolver was at a poise! His dark eyes glared in triumph! Crash! went a ball, through the warrior's body, and Gavan O'Brien, springing on "Norfolk," dashed *around the hill* into the cañon!—The cheers of the men, *now forming up,* greeted Sergeant Gavan, as Gordon's charger bore his avenger safely into the lines!

And until the darkness of that awful night, the shotted salute poured over gallant Jack Gordon's body kept the wild foe at bay!—The game Kentuckian was at rest! Mustered out!

Gavan O'Brien, (fighting on the line,) having hidden beautiful "Norfolk" in a gully where the other horses were covered, heard with a shudder the *last solid volleys sounding far away* fired by

the devoted men, *dying with Custer!* "An' *we can't help them!*" he groaned. "Ah! How shall I live over this awful day?" said the stout Irishman as, (in the dusk,) he crawled around to wounded Pete Foley, and the two talked of the dear dead Captain, still lying below them, his nerveless hands and quiet face upturned to the unpitying stars!—Foley was crying like a child! All the force on the hill could do, was to *hold its own!*

And at home,—at Fair Oaks,—the graceful woman he loved, was on her knees, as the moon rose in peace, lifting her pure hands in petition, to the God of mercy, for the gallant soldier, whose last heart-throb was hers alone!

It was nearly *two weeks* after the fatal Sunday of the Custer massacre, when Vinton Maxwell drove slowly down the avenue of Fair Oaks. Upon the porch, the loving circle was gathered around a *chaise longue.* General Everett, (serious and manly,)—his daughters, with all the solicitude of a soldier's children, were there, with the terrified Rose and honest Harold Durnsford, sore wearied at heart!—For the gentle lady of Fair Oaks asked *twenty* times a day, "Is there *nothing?* No *news,*—no *letters?*"

"What's the matter now? Maxwell acts so

strangely!" muttered Harold, as he saw his friend descend from the carriage at some distance, and send it away to the stables!—"Why did he not *drive up?* Ah!" thought Harold, with an inward misgiving, "I had better go out and *meet him!*"

Pale Marguerite had not as yet seen Captain Maxwell!—The ex-officer's face told the story. He had a journal in his hand! His cheek was ashen! His voice broken! "Motion General Everett to come here *quietly!*" Maxwell said. Harold started! His friend's voice sounded *absolutely strange!* In a few moments, the old General hobbled down the path. *His* anxious eyes sought to read Maxwell's grave face. Vinton silently handed him the journal!

"Tell her! I *can not!* You are a *father!* You must be a *father* to her *now!* And I must be her *brother!*" he gasped.

"Jack Gordon?" gasped the General. *"Not our Jack!"*

"Killed at the Ford of the Big Horn! Died getting the wounded over!"

The old man staggered!—"And Custer?" he said.

"General Custer and five troops were simply

wiped out of existence!" The old soldier tottered back to the porch and burst into tears.

"Marguerite!" said Maxwell; *"my sister!"* The gentle woman's head fell back, helpless, as she read the fatal news in Maxwell's face!

An old colored personage sat on the worm fence of the long lane leading down to Belvoir House, under a September sun! He was black as the ace of spades, and was calmly rubbing an ancient shot wound in his thigh! The bees were gaily humming; the trembling leaves murmured a soft refrain to the aged darkey's song!—His corn-cob pipe was lightly held in his trembling hand! As he watched he sang softly:—

"The sun shines bright on de ole Kentucky home,—
It's summer,—and the darkies all are gay;—
An' I'll sing one song for de old Kentucky home,
For de ole Kentucky home,—so far away!"

His feeble eyes were watery, but he lifted his head, as a trim soldierly veteran drew up before him, mounted on a superb horse!—The stranger wore the chevrons of a First Sergeant of Cavalry, and on the cap shading his dauntless Irish eyes, was the little brass figure **7.**

"Foah God!" cried the negro huskily, as he quickly tumbled off the fence. "Dat Norfolk colt what Mars' Jack took West!"

"I wish to see the 'Captain's Lady,' Uncle!" said the grave-faced soldier!

"Wha' for, white man?"—said the old negro, who was now fondly stroking the beautiful charger.—"Norfolk" seemed to know him!

"Because,"—said the stout Sergeant,—"the Captain's coming home,—sad and silent!—and *this* is the last horse he ever rode!"

"An' you'se Sergeant O'Brien"—cried the negro, his eyes filling with tears!—Gavan O'Brien bowed in silence as he gazed on Jack Gordon's *desolate home!* "Dey's all waitin' for you, Sergeant!" said the negro! "Do'ant take 'Norfolk' down!—Put him in the racin' stables! I can't bear to see that horse no moah!—Mars' Jack he done choose him, an' I train' him!"

"An' de Captain."—The negro was softly crying!

"They're bringing him home *at last!*" said the Sergeant, cap in hand!

The old darkey murmured, "I got my bad leg at Fort Pillow," he cried, "an' yet I'd a' died not to see this day!"

"What's ye're name?" sharply said the Sergeant, as he wiped his eyes!—Professional discipline!

"Pompey Gordon, sah!"

"What shall I do! Will *you* tell 'em?" the cavalryman hesitatingly said.

The old negro said: "I will!"—and he hobbled down to the mansion!

"Ye're a black *man,* but ye're *soul* is *white,*" said O'Brien, as he rode away to the racing stables!

The little circle of Fair Oaks stood around an open grave at Belvoir. In deepest black, her fair sweet face shining down like a benediction on the coffin covered with the colors he died for, Marguerite Calhoun gazed at Jack Gordon's sword, tied with crimson ribbon and great knots of sombre crape! From far and near, the Blue Grass people had gathered! The Belvoir negroes gazed in silent awe upon the coffin, soon to rest beside that of his father, the hero of Buena Vista! At the head of the bier, stood Sergeant Gavan O'Brien, (pale and emaciated,) his honest heart bursting with grief! Pete Foley, (the race rider,) on crutches, gazed at the circle of loving faces!

"An' *he* died to save *my* life, *a poor devil of a bugler!*" Pete Foley registered a vow, which burned in his passionate heart for years!—And Foley *kept* his vow! As Sergeant Gavan O'Brien plucked a few leaves from the nearest bush, he

cast a look, (a last look,)—he thought,—at Jack Gordon's grave! General Everett, leaving the circle, where the new mistress of Belvoir leaned on Maxwell's arm, slowly approached the agitated Sergeant! O'Brien gazed at him in wonder!

"How long is your leave, Sergeant?" the General kindly asked. "It's a good *long* one, General! I have the wife at home now!" said the old warrior, saluting. "I get my discharge papers, an' *final* pay, at New York! *I'm done!* For me heart was broken when we lost the General, an' the *right wing!* — An' *Captain Gordon,* too, God rest his soul!" said the stout soldier, reverently uncovering and crossing himself. "I can never bear to hear 'Boots and Saddles' again since we lost *him!* Pete Foley will go back! He's only a youngster! But *I* mind what my wife once told Gordon, (the darlin' man he was,) 'You'll die in the *Seventh,* an' in *good company.*' Oh! God! It's too *true* it was!"

"I've a surprise for the Captain's lady!" said the old Sergeant; "I've brought her back '*Norfolk,*' an' I'll tell her the last words the Captain said!"

"Where is 'Norfolk'?" said the grave old general.

"Sure, he's down at the *race stable!* The offi-

cers gave me transportation for *him,*—an' I've the Captain's baggage!"

"Come with *me!*" General Everett said.

In the library of Belvoir, the White Lady leaned on General Everett's arm!—The old Sergeant gazed in awe at her pallid beauty! "Sergeant, please tell me *all!* You saw him *last!*"

In a few moments, the sturdy trooper told of Gordon's last wish about "Norfolk," and of that loving, but *unfinished* message!

In a tremulous voice, the gentle woman said, (her tender eyes glistening,) "You'll come *back* here soon, with your good wife! *You* shall not be parted from *'Norfolk'!* I need *him!* I need *you.*" And no man in the world but O'Brien *ever* mounted Jack Gordon's horse *again!*

It came to pass that Pete Foley, after three months' slaving at the care of the gallant steed, went back to the old "Seventh," and far and near that world-wise trooper told tales of the "Captain's Lady," and betrayed an almost marvellous worship of her generosity!—The boys cheered her name, as Foley told them of her care of the *three relics of the shattered Regiment!*

There were *two* bridals before the winter snows whitened brave Jack Gordon's grave! *One,* at Seaton Hall, where General Everett surrendered

to the overjoyed Durnsford the command of the untamable Flossie; whose real tenderness to Marguerite had touched all their hearts! He said, with a sigh: "I hope *you* will never regret the day, my child!"

With a flash of her old spirit, Flossie, in bridal robes, (one of the very *prettiest* and *daintiest* of brides,) drew down the dear old gray head and kissed her father,—"*I* will not! Harold *may!*" she answered.

"I'll go bail, I *will not!*" said the now ecstatic English lover!

"With a graceful thoughtfulness,—even Marguerite Calhoun attended the wedding! — She seized a quiet moment and handed "Mrs. Harold Durnsford," a casket of the rarest jewels! Flossie opened her eyes in protest!

"Ah! my child! *My dear one!*" said the "Captain's Lady," "I will *never* need them, for I shall soon enter the Convent of the Sacred Heart! Yes! dear! They were my own! *All* of them! Now, they are yours! Think of Gordon when you wear them! You loved my Jack!"

When Sergeant Gavan O'Brien, (in his very brightest uniform,) a marvel of military neatness, saw the solemn cortége sweep up, in the old church, where Marguerite Calhoun sealed her

final vows a few months later (looking on the circle of friends, whose faces shone with all that human love can give of tenderness and *fond adieu,*) he turned to his weeping wife and whispered, "Sure, an' it's an *angel on earth* the 'Captain's Lady' is!" Others thought so as well as the old soldier!

Sweet Marguerite Calhoun,—(the Captain's Lady *no more,*) was known far and near, as time rolled on, as the "very gentlest Sister of the Sacred Heart!" At fair Belvoir, a happy hundred of orphans blessed the charity of the sweet, star-eyed woman whose kind face sometimes beamed on them! Free from all human passion,—past all mortal pain,—Sister Marguerite still thought sometimes, tenderly, of the days when the beloved Jack Gordon had listened to her loving words: "We can wait! I will marry *no man but you!*" And so, in peace and honor, the sweet rightful "Lady of Belvoir" clings to that unfinished message, "*Tell her,—*" the *rest* she *alone* knows in her placid, but *still human* heart!

Of the enduring happiness of Flossie and Harold,—of the great social foreign raid of General Everett upon his friend Robert Durnsford,—of the home life of the Rose of Seaton Hall, it needs no prophet to speak!—It is true

that a sweet-faced woman often gazes wistfully on the laughing children romping at Fair Oaks, who all love gentle Sister Marguerite!

The iron furnaces of "Seatonville" flash out red glares at night, as the trains sweep on through the peaceful valleys where fierce Phil Sheridan carried once fire and sword! Happiness reigns at Seaton Hall, wreathed in the roses of these brighter years!

An old cavalry Sergeant, gazing at a riderless horse on the rich pastures of Belvoir, often told the story of how dare-devil Pete Foley rode "Norfolk" in the shades of night, to save two lovely women's lives;—and of the day when gallant Jack Gordon faced the savage foe, and dragged the bugler from under the Indians' fire! Sergeant Gavan O'Brien, of the "Seventh," was voted the freedom of the Blue Grass country!—And "Iron Heart" was not forgotten in these chronicles! The waving grass is thick on the Pawnee's lonely grave, but his memory is still cherished!

"Norfolk" had been lying long under the oaks of the beautiful Kentucky meadows, when gray Sergeant Gavan O'Brien read before the door of his cosy cottage, (in early 1891,) a letter signed "Peter Foley, Sergeant K troop, Seventh Cavalry."

—It told him of the "terrific slashing" the fighting "Seventh" gave the Sioux at "Wounded Knee," in the far west, a few weeks before! "So that same wild boy's a *Sergeant* now!" the old man murmured.

"An' a good one, *too!*" cried the still energetic Mrs. O'Brien.

"Here's a letter from McGinness, the last of the *old 'non-com's'!* He writes me that Foley killed two big warriors single handed, and his shout as he saw them fall, was, 'Boys! There's *one* spread eagle for Custer, an' *one* for Captain Gordon'!" The Seventh, in its own stern pride, had dealt a crushing blow to the foe, which called back the halcyon days of the daring "Long Hair," whose blood made "Custer's Hill" sacred forever!

That very year, a happy matron, travelling through the lovely valleys of northern France, leaned on the arm of her soldier husband, and gazed on a lonely grave at Avricourt, marked *"Beatrice!"* Maxwell's voice was sad, as he told his wife the sorrow of the dead past.

"You *never* told me all this sad story *before!*"

"I could not *bear to*, darling! But I felt that you should know it *now!*"

And when they turned away toward happier scenes, a bunch of white roses lay on the turf above the ashes of the "Masked Venus!" The soiled sister could not hear the prayer of a loving woman; but the English Rose knew that, hovering over us all, there is the promise of an *Infinite Mercy!* God's rainbow shines on the grave of even the erring ones!

THE END.

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